

SINGAPORE KATE

Publisher's Note

Kate Marlowe went to the Far East as a young and innocent girl, straight from the shelter of her home on a Sussex farm. The story is of her losing battle against predatory men and women bent on her corruption, and of how she fought fire with fire to become Singapore Kate, the most notorious woman on the China Coast. In two decades of 'moral piracy' she amassed a great fortune and, before she quit the scene for ever, contrived a ferocious revenge on those who had conspired to ruin her. The story is told simply and starkly, without moral judgments. Kate is an unforgettable character and one is tempted to agree with her dictum that 'nobody with pride could have done otherwise'.

By the same Author

THE THREE BAMBOOS
BONIN
THE SMALL GENERAL
MR ON LOONG
THE GULF OF TIME
ELEPHANT WALK
GENTLEMAN OF CHINA
FOLLOW THE SEVENTH MAN
STORM CENTRE
A WORTHY MAN
A LONG WAY FROM PIMLICO
HONOURABLE ANCESTOR
BLIND TIGER
AFRICAN GUINEA PIG
THE BIG ONE GOT AWAY
THE CRUISE OF THE THREE BROTHERS

Short Stories

PRIVATE ENTERPRISE
THE RADIO-ACTIVE GENERAL
THE TALKING DOG

Non-Fiction

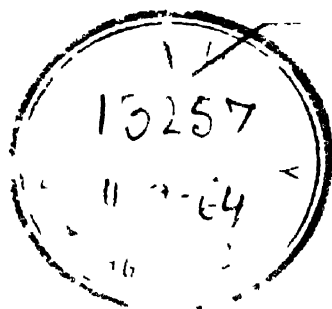
THE PRINCE OF STORYTELLERS

SINGAPORE KATE

A Novel

by

ROBERT STANDISH



P

PETER DAVIES : LONDON

First published 1919

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN FOR PETER DAVIES LIMITED
BY BOOKPRINT LIMITED, KINGSWOOD, SURREY**

INTRODUCTION

ONE DAY in the late spring or early summer of 1920, I went to Jessfield Park, on the outskirts of Shanghai's International Settlement where, I had been told, there was a magnificent display of flowers. While admiring a row of long-stemmed sweet-peas, in delicate shades I had never seen before, I became aware of a woman on the opposite side of the flower-bed. I was startled, for I had believed myself to be alone. She was then – granted that I had not at that date encountered many – the most strikingly beautiful woman I had ever seen, but I doubt whether in the intervening forty-odd years I have seen her equal. Her head was uncovered, revealing a great pile of hair the colour of burnished copper. She had beautifully chiselled features, culminating in a chin with a you-be-damned tilt to it. The eyes were of a curiously neutral shade between grey and blue, revealing nothing of what went on behind them, while the dominant characteristic of the whole face was one of pitiful sadness. I stared. I could not help it. Her eyes – and how bleak they were! – met mine. They were full of resentment.

Normally, being very young, I was shy and far too unsure of myself to go picking up strange women, and this was a woman, not a girl. I put her at thirty years of age, but, as I learned many years later, she was forty. Then, to my amazement, I heard myself give utterance to my thoughts. 'With hair that colour,' I said, 'you should have green eyes.'

Turning on me a look of withering contempt, she walked out of the park, moving with grace and arrogance. I saw her get into a smart victoria drawn by a pair of greys and, as the clip-clop of the ponies' hooves died away in the distance, I blushed, literally not figuratively, at my own ill manners. But that fantastic head of hair and the sadness of the face beneath it were imprinted indelibly in memory.

Sixteen years later, crises in my private life made it both possible and necessary for me to achieve what had been my

ambition since schooldays, to drop everything with the idea of becoming a professional writer. As I have never believed that the pure flame of genius burns brightest to the accompaniment of chilblains in a garret, I set off towards the Mediterranean where living was then cheap and frost-bite relatively rare. I spent the next three years defacing reams of paper with very little in the way of tangible results.

I installed myself comfortably, near to a remote village in the Alpes Maritimes, far from the fleshpots and temptations of the coastal strip. One of my first encounters, which took place at the village post office, was with a middle-aged Chinese, who looked and spoke more like an Anglican bishop than any Anglican bishop I have ever seen or heard. He had a fruity baritone and stately delivery almost too good to be true. 'How comes it that you speak such excellent English?' I asked him, remembering the ghastly pidgin English of the China Coast.

'My father,' he replied with dignity, 'was butler to the Governor of Hongkong.'

That put me in my place.

However, I was able to help him with some difficulty over language as he was unable to speak any French. Honours were even. His name, he told me, was Young John, to distinguish him from his father, who had always been known as Old John.

It was more than a year after the encounter that I met Young John's employer. This was on the introduction of a man I knew slightly in London. His name was Gordon Maitland.

Young John's employer, I learned, was an Englishwoman who had acquired the Italian name of Ferrari by marriage. She lived alone, except for servants, about two miles from me. She was by way of being a recluse. When she came out into the garden to greet Maitland and myself, I recognized her at once as the woman I had seen through a hedge of sweet-peas in Jessfield Park some sixteen years previously. She looked a little older, but not very much. Without specifically saying so, I made it clear that I had seen her before. For a moment her eyes darkened with annoyance. Then she said – and I thought anxiously: 'Where have you seen me before? You have, haven't you?'

'I once saw you admiring sweet-peas in Jessfield Park,' I replied. 'I'm afraid I was rather brash on that occasion.'

'Yes, I remember,' she said, her face lighting up with a warm smile. 'You thought that I ought to have green eyes . . . and said so. You were quite right, of course, but it was startling.'

We left it at that.

It became apparent during the evening that Maitland and Madame Ferrari were deeply attached to each other. More than once they exchanged barbed remarks which obviously hurt deeply. Had they not been devoted to each other, I argued with some logic to support me, what they said would merely have been rude and would have been dismissed as such. I cannot remember anything specific, but they said things with a double edge, which only they understood. In fact it was not only rude to me but boring. I told Maitland as much the next time I saw him and he had the grace to apologize.

The most memorable part of that evening, aside from the recognition, was the simply glorious contents of Madame Ferrari's Chinese drawing-room. Without pretending to expert knowledge, I know I have never seen finer porcelain, carved ivory, carved jade and crystal, or lacquer furniture. The curtains and upholstery were of richly brocaded Chinese silks, the dominant colours in which were a soft green and crimson. The silk-and-wool carpet was superb and in the same colour scheme.

My only criticism was that there was rather too much crammed into that vaulted Provençal room. It was overpowering.

I met Madame Ferrari several times between then and the outbreak of war in 1919, but only on terms of the utmost formality. In July 1919 she had her treasures loaded into a van and removed to Switzerland, where she owned a lakeside villa between Geneva and Lausanne. There she spent the war years. This I learned from Maitland, whom I met a couple of times in London. Madame Ferrari did not then loom very large on my horizon. Nor did I expect ever to see her again.

Mine was, I suppose, the instinctive reaction of a would-be writer; I began to weave fanciful stories about her, impelled no more by her beauty than by the lack-lustre air she wore and a

curiously despairing, hopeless quality in her voice and manner of speech. If she really cared about anything, except perhaps her privacy, I failed to find it.

It was not until 1920 that I met her again. I met Young John in the post office and he said that Madame Ferrari had been inquiring for me. He knew she would be delighted if I called. I doubted it, but I called and, somewhat to my surprise, was quite warmly received.

Getting to know her better was not easy for she refused all invitations. Except for long walks in the mountains and an occasional visit to the towns on the coast, she almost never went anywhere.

In 1920 I met her in the mountains some seven or eight miles from home, walking strongly with two bull terriers. I recall the date quite well because during the rest of the long walk she admitted to me that it was her seventieth birthday. Except for the fact that she had been a mature woman in 1920, when I was a callow youth, I would not have put her age as a day more than my own, whereas she was twenty years older.

That same evening was a landmark in our relations. Madame Ferrari unbuttoned a trifle, anyway to the extent of splitting a bottle of champagne with me. The cold aloofness vanished. She became warm and friendly, losing the air of secretiveness. By now I had learned not to ask any questions which could possibly be construed as prying into her private affairs, which often made conversation stilted and awkward.

Before the evening was over, I mentioned that I was driving into Italy the following day, to lunch with some friends who were staying in Allassio. 'I wonder,' she said eagerly, 'if you would mind taking me with you. Young John's driving makes me very nervous. I want to go to a village this side of Allassio. You could leave me there on the way and pick me up on the return journey . . . that is, if you would like to.'

I told her I would be delighted and I agreed to call for her on the following morning at nine o'clock. There were bound to be delays at the frontier and the coast road on from Ventimiglia was irritatingly slow.

In the morning we made good time and soon after noon, a few miles before Alassio, we turned up a narrow valley at right angles to the sea. Three or four miles up the road we came to a poverty-stricken little village. In the rear locker of the car were some plant cuttings, a trowel and a small watering-can. Putting these and a folding camp chair on the road for her, I left her outside a tiny walled cemetery. 'Take your time about coming back for me,' she said. 'I have plenty to do.'

It was between four and five o'clock when I returned. Looking over the cemetery wall, I espied her sitting in the camp chair beside a grave, which she had spent the day tidying. This, when I approached it, revealed itself as the last resting-place of one Aldo Ferrari, who had died in 1943.

It was a poor village and the grave was that of a poor person, which accorded ill with Madame Ferrari herself, who was patently an extremely rich woman.

Husband? Son? I had no least idea, for the grave indicated no age. Just the name.

'Aren't you curious to know whose grave that is?' she asked me.

'Yes, very,' I replied, 'but not curious enough to risk a snub by asking. You don't exactly invite intimate questions, you know.'

'No, I suppose I don't,' she said contritely. 'It's hard to shake oneself out of the habits of a lifetime. But in that grave lies all that is left of a gallant, chivalrous little man . . . the only human being who showed me a spark of decency and human kindness at a time when I was desperately in need of it. He was, in a sort of way, my husband.'

'But surely,' I said, faintly irritated, 'he was, or he wasn't?'

'Things aren't always as cut and dried as that. It is a long, long story and one day, if I can summon the courage, I will tell it to you. There will be gaps, but these can be filled in by Gordon Maitland, and the things which he doesn't know are in that carved ivory box on the blackwood table in my drawing-room. I call it my memory box. It is filled with a weird assortment of odds and ends collected on the way through life, each one of

them a kind of milestone. There is nothing of value. There are my diaries covering what I call the critical years. Probably, but I don't promise that yet, I will arrange for you to have it when I die. If I do this, you will find that my life will make a strange story for you to tell. Please try to tell it with compassion, for I have been very unhappy for nearly fifty years. I don't seek to excuse myself for what I have done, but as God is my witness, I don't see how anyone with pride could have done otherwise.'

Between 1950 and 1960, at odd times and in odd snatches, I learned much of Madame Ferrari's life story, and in her eightieth year I was one of three people who followed her to her grave. Gordon Maitland, who hobbled beside me on crutches, was another and the third was Young John.

A few days after Madame Ferrari's death, Young John arrived where I was living bearing in his arms, carefully wrapped in a blanket, the carved ivory Memory Box. He handed it to me with reluctance, explaining that he only did so in obedience to her explicit instructions. In his view the contents of the box should be destroyed and he hoped I would reach the same conclusion. A few hours afterwards, Gordon Maitland called on me. We talked far into the night. He told me many things which filled awkward gaps in the story, but perhaps the most telling thing of all was when he said: 'Now Kate has gone, I have no more reason to go on living. She was the only woman I ever loved. I believe she loved me, but even of that I am not sure. She was a strange woman. She never quite forgave me for what I did to her and I have never forgiven myself. She wished her story to be told and her wish has always been my law. If I can help you, call on me, but don't waste time because I shall soon be following Kate.'

'You may well decide that you don't want to tell the story at all, that it is better left in obscurity. But if you tell it, I beg you not to glorify Kate. That, in her eyes, would be a crime. She was what she was. Everything she did in her life was done with eyes wide open in the full knowledge of what she was doing . . . the good and the bad.'

I was still undecided whether to write the story and I was in

no hurry. One difficulty was that all efforts to open the Memory Box had failed. It was the product of a devious Chinese mind. Its contents, I believed, would decide me one way or another.

Much of what Maitland told me was told via a tape-recorder. He found it easier than telling me face to face. I did not use the tapes until learning, four months after Kate Ferrari's death, that he had died in London.

Finally, having carried out many of his employer's wishes under the control of the administrator of the estate, Young John came to see me and to say good-bye before returning to Hong-kong, his birthplace. The first question he asked was whether I had opened the ivory box. I told him in reply that it had defeated me. 'It was madam's wish that I should tell you the secret of it,' he said. 'It was also her wish that you do not hurry to open it.'

We talked for an hour or more, and in the gentle cadences of his voice it seemed that Kate Ferrari came to life again. Young John had given her a lifetime of devotion, and as he reminisced I realized he only remembered the good, the kind and the gentle things she had done. The bad were as if they had never happened.

'To open the box,' Young John told me before he left, 'you must twist the tail of the tiger with one hand while pressing the head of the Sage with the other.'

Due to a curious reluctance which held me back, it was weeks before I went through the simple motions which opened the lid. As I went through the pitiful debris of a wasted and shattered life, my eyes were often dim with tears. Many of the objects I found there had no apparent significance, while others had a poignancy which tore at the heart-strings. The only object which could be called a sentimental keepsake was a gold religious medallion and chain, thrust into her hand by the man who was 'in a sort of way' her husband.

Mention is made from time to time of Kate Ferrari's diaries. These were not diaries in the formal sense, but odd jottings thrown into the Memory Box at odd times. Many of them lost their significance through being undated, while others were

meaningless to anyone but her, the random thoughts of an unhappy person committed to paper in the hope that the simple act of setting them down would leach some of their bitterness. I am convinced that the contents of the Memory Box had not been gathered for any eye but Kate's. Indeed, I doubt whether even she had looked inside it for years, for there were things there so completely personal that she must have forgotten their existence. Otherwise, I feel certain, she would not have allowed them – even after death – to fall into the hands of a comparative stranger.

Except for money matters – and here the record was most precise and the continuity unbroken – there was no special system or chronology. The accumulation of money ranked in Kate's mind like the building of a dike wide and high enough to give sure refuge from the economic storms beyond. Whatever else might befall her, she was plainly determined that poverty should never again be the root-cause of any personal decision.

Everything was done to Kate Ferrari too early, so that while still a girl she shed all her illusions about human motive, living the rest of her life behind an armour of cynicism through which she felt nothing more than superficially and knew nothing about life as it is lived by ordinary people. Underneath her protective enamel she was green as grass and unable to cope with the ordinary simple problems of life.

I did not really begin to understand this strange woman until after she was seventy years of age, and although by then I knew a great deal about the kind of life she had led, the illusion persisted through to the end that she was nearer to being an inexperienced girl than a case-hardened old woman.

The truth – and it took me a long time to realize it – is that Kate was never a really mature woman. The brutalized girl never grew up, but was translated from girlhood to old age, omitting middle age. Before I knew anything at all about her, the first adjective I applied to her in my mind was 'virginal', and even now, with the benefit of hindsight, I cannot think of a better one. There were men in her life, but many hours of conversation about them convinced me that they made no more

lasting impression on her than I make on my shaving-mirror.

My private thoughts and opinions about Kate will remain private, and if anywhere in these pages I have allowed approval or condemnation to creep in, it is wholly unintentional and should be disregarded.

R.S.

One

A frayed piece of string about two feet in length came out of a recess in the Memory Box. Attached to one end – dusty and all its brilliance gone – was a rhinestone shoe-buckle. On Kate Ferrari's right cheek there had been a tiny scar made by this buckle. She had kept it as a kind of early milestone on the road to disillusionment.

IN THE card-room of the Harmonie Club, which was in the Weltevreden quarter of Batavia, the chief town of Java, six men were seated at the poker table, playing for high stakes. With one exception the players do not matter. The exception was a young man named Colin Wilder, his darkly handsome face marred by a weak mouth and slightly shifty eyes. The game itself was certainly more noteworthy than any of the players, for, if legend were to be believed, it had been going non-stop, night and day, for a little more than a century.

Colin Wilder had been sitting in the game for three days and nights, except for a few hours of sleep snatched in a long chair on the veranda. It had been a disastrous three days. All his savings were gone and most of a sum belonging to his employers, for which he was accountable. At three o'clock in the morning, five hours before he was due to sail from Tandjong Priok, the port of Batavia, his luck took a turn for the better and he began to win heavily. One of the other players looked at his watch – as in casinos, there was no clock in the room – and said sourly: 'If you're going to be on the dock in Singapore to meet the blushing bride, Colin, you'd better watch the time.'

'Leave just when the cards are running for me? Like hell I will! If I don't win back what you sharks have taken off me, there won't be any wedding bells. I won't dare show my face,' he said, shocked by the realization that this was the sober truth.

The changed luck, fitful at first, began to run like a strong

At six in the morning, just as the first daylight was creeping into the room, Colin had won back all his firm's money. There was still time for another hour's play, with a further hour to spare for the drive to the ship.

'Don't waste time. Deal 'em!' he urged the others. 'I can't leave here until I've won the price of a honeymoon.'

With the next hand he knew that the gods were on his side and working for him. He was dealt three sevens. Keeping the sevens and a jack, to make it appear that he was drawing to a flush or a straight, he drew one card. It was another jack. Another one-card draw filled a flush. Most of the firm's money went back on the table before Colin's full-house won the pot.

At seven o'clock – the cards still running his way – he calculated that an hour was more than he needed for the drive to Tandjong Priok. It could be done in forty-five minutes, barring accidents. A boy was sent to find a fast pony carriage and to load Colin's luggage. It was soon after the turn of the century and motor cars were rare in Java.

Then it was Colin's deal. There was a large pot. Three deals had passed without anyone having openers. Someone opened. Colin was queen high without even a pair. He raised the ante to half the pot, which was the limit, and drew two cards. The opener, feeling that Colin was unbeatable, threw in a pair of aces. It was now Colin's turn to feel that he was unbeatable and so, for the next three hours, it seemed. When around noon the game broke up and other players slipped into the vacant seats, he had won back all his losses, plus more than a year's pay. He had missed the Singapore boat, of course, but that seemed a small price. Kate, his bride, should have a rip-roaring honeymoon by way of compensation for arriving in Singapore to find that he had not met her. When he explained to her that but for this big win he would have lost his job, with a fair chance of being prosecuted for converting his firm's money to his own use, he was sure that she would understand.

The one tangible reality was the huge pile of money on the dressing-table when, far gone in exhaustion, he fell into a deep sleep.

Early the next morning, after sleeping for twenty hours, Colin awakened with a foul taste in his mouth. Surveying his weak, unshaven face in the mirror, he realized for the first time what a lucky escape he had had from disaster. Then, for a weak man, he made a strong decision. More surprising still, he kept to it. Paying the entire sum into the bank, he did not play poker again in Java. Nor, just in case he should be tempted to weaken, did he touch liquor again until, three days later, he boarded a ship for Singapore. At no time was he able to see the enormity of his failure to meet his bride. It was a pity and he hoped she would not be too disappointed, but nothing short of flames coming through the floor would have persuaded him to forsake the card-table while he was in a winning vein. No woman as intelligent as Kate, he was sure, could think otherwise, especially when it was explained to her that their whole future had depended on the outcome of that poker game.

Colin had cabled his bride to wait for him at Van Twest's Hotel in Singapore and was mildly indignant to find waiting for him at this frowsy establishment a cool note from Kate to the effect that she was staying at Raffles Hotel. 'The Harveys . . . he's a judge of sorts,' Kate explained when Colin found her, 'were very kind to me during the voyage, and they more or less insisted that I stay here with them.'

'Well,' he said with a martyred air, 'if the advice of mere ship-board acquaintances means more to you than mine, I suppose there's nothing more to be said.'

'There's plenty more to be said,' retorted Kate tartly, 'and I intend to say it. What's more, I've taken a look at this Van Twest's Hotel that you seem to think so wonderful and I agree with Mr Harvey that it isn't the kind of place where a decent woman could stay alone.'

Kate, Colin decided, was at her loveliest in anger. It was an illusion, of course, but it seemed that her hair, looking like burnished copper glinting in the sun, threw off sparks. It was only the eyes which made him feel uncomfortable. Officially, they were blue, but in anger they turned to a cold slate-grey, unwinking and steady. Scornful was the right word, but Colin

slurred over that because he was quite sure that no woman's eyes could be scornful when turned in his direction.

Nevertheless, with Kate in this mood, he decided, it was not the time to tell her about the poker game. She might react too violently. A mountain road washed away by floods would sound better. There were mountains in Java and tropical rain was quite unpredictable. Roads did get washed away.

Women, Colin decided, exaggerated the importance of trifles, but a little soft soap and blarney always brought about a more reasonable frame of mind. His particular brand was never known to fail. 'To me, darling, cooped up on that little ship and worrying about you, the two days' journey from Batavia seemed like two weeks. Van Twest's Hotel, of course, isn't anything like as good as Raffles, but the manager is by way of being a friend of mine and his wife would have looked after you.'

It sounded so completely reasonable, like almost everything Colin said. Lies, being tailor-made to fit a given situation, have many advantages over truth, which has to stand on its own feet. It was not so much that Colin Wilder was a liar, but that he loved to cushion awkward truths against shock. It was not reasonable to expect Kate, who probably did not even know the rules of poker, let alone understand its finer points, to see things through his eyes. Given time, of course, she would, but in the meanwhile it would have been foolish to raise doubts in her pretty head. And what a pretty head!

She was a nice girl, and being married to her might be fun. All the same, there was something very disconcerting about those eyes. They were so . . . bleak.

Colin, on leave from Malaya, had met Kate down in Sussex where her father, Kenneth Marlowe, was that strange hybrid, a gentleman farmer. The friends with whom he had been staying had been friends of the Marlowes. Their pew in the parish church had been behind the Marlowe pew. Colin had proposed to Kate on a southern slope below Chanctonbury Ring and in the evening, hand in hand, they had come to her father to ask him for his blessing.

'Katie, my dear,' Marlowe had said when alone with her later,

'I suppose you realize that Colin is a weak man and that in the years ahead you will need to be strong enough for two. He's a likeable chap, loaded with charm, but . . .'

He left it there.

'I love him, Dad,' Kate had said simply. 'Surely that is all that matters?'

'It helps, Katie. It helps.'

'I'm strong, Dad, maybe even stronger than you think. Maybe the thing which draws me to Colin is this weakness you talk about.'

It was the summer after Queen Victoria's death in January, the first summer of the twentieth century, a time of high hope for a world through which the winds of change were already whistling ominously.

Colin sailed for the East and the understanding was that Kate would follow early in the new year.

Let it go upon the record that Colin Wilder gave Kate two blissfully happy weeks spent as the only passengers aboard a coastwise vessel bound for Hongkong via Saigon and back to Singapore. He was kind, tender and thoughtful. In so far as a self-centred weakling can ever be, he was in love, or at least obsessed with Kate's lovely, voluptuous body to the exclusion of any other. He did not know, because the need had not yet arisen, whether he would climb the highest mountains, or swim the widest river for her. Nobody knows that until faced with it. Anyway, nobody but poets.

The whys and the wherefores do not matter. On the credit side of the ledger were two weeks of happiness, unclouded by the smallest misunderstanding or disagreement. More than that might have been cloying to the palate, for in unadulterated happiness there is not enough thrust and parry to give zest and variety to life. Many people are denied even such a brief span as two weeks, calling it happiness when they are not actively unhappy.

The Aberdonian shareholders and directors of the company

which employed Colin had economical ideas about most things, but in none so much as the housing of the young men who worked for them in the depressing green twilight of their rubber plantations. The pneumatic tyre had not yet come into its own at the turn of the century. Most of the other uses of rubber were theoretical and rubber-growing was still regarded as a gamble.

Colin's bungalow stood upon a slight eminence surrounded as far as the eye could see by the dull sheen of rubber foliage. Being at little more than tree-top height above the plain, there was the illusion that there was no earth, only rubber leaves stretching without end across a windless green sea.

The bungalow itself was constructed of wood with a corrugated-iron roof, whose shrinkage and expansion with the changes of temperature sounded like a devil's tattoo. When heavy rain fell the sound was deafening.

The furniture was locally made on massive lines, virtually indestructible. For sleeping, thin cotton mattresses were laid over a criss-cross of coir rope strands which sagged almost to the floor. The rooms, which had whitewashed jute-hessian ceilings, were almost perfect cubes without any aesthetic concessions. The only mirror in the principal bedroom was – Kate measured it – eleven inches square. It was cracked and needed re-silvering. Except on the covered lounge-veranda, open on three sides and the only tolerable part of the bungalow, there was no furniture beyond beds, kitchen tables and chairs. Nor was there any floor covering. Everything except some cotton sheets, a few tattered towels and some cutlery, most of which had been stolen from ships or hotels, was company property. It was so bad, viewed through a woman's eyes, as to be laughable.

'I warned you that it wasn't exactly luxurious,' said Colin on seeing Kate's dismay.

There followed for the Chinese cook and house-boy, who were far gone in sloth, a week of almost unendurable activity, urged on by the lash of Kate's tongue, which was just as effective as if they had understood English, and the scorn they read in her eyes. 'Go on like this, darling,' warned Colin, 'and they're capable of putting something nasty in your coffee.'

‘Well, sooner than live in such filth and squalor,’ she retorted, ‘I’ll drink it.’

With materials bought in the Malay *kampung* three miles distant, Kate made curtains, cushion-covers and a counterpane for the bed. The mosquito net fell to pieces when washed, and until new netting could be sent from Kuala Lumpur they were almost asphyxiated by the smoke of joss-sticks which, in theory at least, were supposed to keep mosquitoes at bay. Hardest of all was to introduce elementary hygiene in the kitchen.

The sanitary arrangements were so appalling and Kate so disgusted that for nearly a week her body virtually ceased its normal functions.

Colin accepted the new régime somewhat in the manner of the servants. He did not object to the place being clean, or to the battle against the flies, or the boiling of drinking water, or fresh flowers being put about in the jam jars which did duty for vases. But it was plain that he thought the changes quite unnecessary.

Kate discovered something about Colin in these early weeks of their marriage. She learned that he used alcohol as a kind of anaesthetic of the critical faculties. Cold sober, he disliked a fly-blown table-cloth, but with three or four gin *pahits* under his belt, he not only did not see the fly-spots, but, seeing them, would not have cared anyway.

When two letters – the second most insistent – came from the Singapore office demanding a report on the property in Java, where he had spent six months, a few whisky sodas at sundown made the whole thing seem less pressing.

Colin’s intake of alcohol, viewed quantitatively, was not particularly large. In fact it was, Kate found, considerably less than that of his lonely, bored and rather uncouth neighbours. What appalled her was the way he used alcohol as a way round any awkward fact which he was called upon to face. There was little of criticism in Kate’s mind. She already thought of her new home as ‘this awful country’, blaming upon it, its slothful people and humid Turkish bath climate, all his shortcomings. Instead of blaming him for coming to table with great rings of sweat

visible under the armpits of his white jackets, she had them removed and clean jackets put out. He left the bungalow at 5.30 every morning to muster the coolies and get them started on their day's work, so she overlooked him coming to the breakfast table unshaven an hour later. But the time spent consuming gin *pahits* at noon, she insisted, would be better spent shaving.

These things were done firmly, but with a gentle, loving hand, and there was no sting. Poor Colin had led a rotten life and it was her mission in life to make it a better one for him.

She was still in love with him and would remain so while convinced that he needed her in the dual capacity of wife and mother. Kate had long since recognized for what it was the weakness in Colin's character and, as she had once said to her father, believed she had enough strength for them both. It may even have been true.

Money, or the lack of it, was at the root of most of Colin's troubles, for he did not seem to understand the handling of money, his own or anyone else's. With his poker winnings, he had first made up the deficiency in the firm's cash, using some of the rest to pay off the most pressing of his creditors. A succession of collectors came out the forty-odd miles from Kuala Lumpur to obtain payment for clothes, liquor, food and repayment of money borrowed at ruinous rates of interest.

When word came from England that Kate's father was dead, Colin saw in this a ray of hope. Kenneth Marlowe had seemed to be a man who lived well, playing at farming rather than relying upon it. 'I suppose,' he said to Kate when a decent interval had elapsed, 'that you'll inherit everything?'

'Yes, everything,' she replied bitterly, resenting the question. 'He warned me long ago that the mortgage would swallow the farm and that his other debts would swallow everything else. Poor darling Daddy wasn't very sharp about money.'

'But he lived in pretty good style,' said Colin, his face dropping. 'I thought . . .' He left the sentence unfinished.

Kate realized with horror how disappointed and shocked Colin was by the news. His handsome face was twisted with the

sort of petulant look seen on the face of an over-indulged child who has been thwarted.

The episode might have meant less to Kate if it had not been the signal for Colin to begin a bout of heavy drinking which lasted more than a week. Once, during a frenzy of irritation brought on by her remonstrances with him about his slack ways, he struck Kate. It was a heavy, open-handed blow across the face which knocked her off her feet. Kate's reply a few seconds later was to lay open both his cheeks with the first weapon coming to hand, which was a supple rattan cane. 'Raise your hand to me again,' she said in a voice which grated ominously, 'and I'll leave you.'

Looking at her cold set face and blazing eyes, he knew that she meant it, and to hide the image of himself which he saw reflected, he went back to the bottle.

Colin was charmingly contrite when it was over, but each of them knew, without putting it into words, that things would never be quite the same again.

Over the next weeks Colin did no drinking at home, but when he returned in the evening – usually about an hour later than his normal time – there was always liquor on his breath. It was unlikely that he drank at a neighbour's house, for the nearest European neighbour was five miles distant. Nor was there anywhere in the villages around where drink could be obtained. Kate assumed, therefore, that he did his drinking at his office in the rubber factory.

One day, strolling alone in the cool evening air just before sundown, Kate heard Colin's laughter coming from a small house on a knoll above rice fields about a mile from the bungalow. Hidden by the semi-darkness under the rubber trees, Kate advanced until she was little more than twenty yards from where Colin, glass in hand, lolled at ease in a planter's chair, on the arm of which sat a pretty Malay girl whom she had often seen, wondering at the hostility she read in the girl's eyes. Colin appeared quite at ease and the two were talking in animated fashion, pausing occasionally to laugh at some joke between them. The scene was one of pure domesticity. Kate watched

while Colin patted the girl's bottom, sending her into the house for another drink. She chose this moment to reveal herself, stepping out into the rays of the dying sun and allowing her husband to see her and realize that she had seen everything. That way, she argued, there need be no scene, no lies, no recriminations. Without waiting until the girl came out of the house, Kate walked swiftly back home and, when Colin returned an hour later, her packing was well advanced.

They dined together that evening for the last time, observing the decencies for the sake of appearances in front of the servants. 'I suppose you realize that I am leaving you,' said Kate over the coffee.

'Yes, I supposed so,' replied Colin. 'Can't say that I altogether blame you. Would it be any good throwing myself on your mercy and telling you that I need you . . . more than ever?' he asked, the words sounding stilted and unreal.

'Not the least,' said Kate, matching his conversational tone. 'It's all over, Colin. To me it's as though it never was. In the morning I am going. I shall want you to arrange transportation for me to Kuala Lumpur and that, as far as you are concerned, is the end.'

Soon after dawn a pony cart with a Malay driver pulled up at the bungalow. The Chinese servants, with unconcealed satisfaction, loaded Kate's steamer trunk and two smaller cases into the cart and, with calculated insolence, turned their backs. It had been bad enough taking orders from a woman, but there had been an irreparable loss of face and self-esteem in the fact that, inexplicably, they had been frightened of her, unable to meet the scorn they had read in those grey eyes which, in moments of anger, were almost ferocious.

Colin was not on hand to see Kate go. She was glad of that, for there was nothing more to be said. The cheque which he left in an envelope for her expenses was, characteristically, dishonoured at the bank in Kuala Lumpur. Fortunately, Kate had a little money, all that was left of her father's parting gift of a hundred pounds.

The track led past the little house where Kate had watched

Colin patting the bottom of his pretty Malay mistress with an unmistakably proprietorial air. The girl herself, clad only in a length of white silk wound carelessly around her graceful figure, stood on the porch in the slanting rays of the morning sun. Her big brown eyes were alight with triumph. Beside her was a little boy, aged between three and four. He had the look of his mother, but there was no doubting that Colin was his father, even down to the weakly voluptuous cleft chin.

The lad was whirling something on a piece of string, something that glinted. At sight of Kate he forgot his plaything and, letting the string slip through his fingers, turned on her a look of fierce hostility amazing in such a child. The whole story was as plain to read as if set down in black and white. The glinting object, trailing its streamer of string, struck Kate on the cheek, drawing a few drops of blood. It was a rhinestone buckle which had fallen off one of her own shoes while out walking.

Kate put the buckle away in her bag, her eyes hardening as she did so. It was a piece for her memory box, to be looked at and handled whenever she might feel tempted to think kindly of the weakling she had married.

Her feelings towards the Malay girl in this moment of triumph were of sympathy rather than resentment, for the triumph would be short-lived. Nothing was more sure. The Colins of this world scattered their seed with a light heart and went on their way with a laugh.

Two

A cutting from the Straits Times announcing the arrival at Raffles Hotel of Madame Rosalie with the latest gowns from Europe. In the margin in Kate Ferrari's handwriting was pencilled: 'This was the turning-point. Everything began here.'

IN 1903 there were strict limits anywhere in the world to the kinds of employment open to young women of gentle birth. But in the Far East the choice was even more restricted. A few, very few, people employed European women as governesses for their children, but not many women wanted a radiant, lovely creature like Kate in their homes and within reach of their husbands. They preferred plain, faded spinsters, unlikely to create problems.

Kate went the rounds of the big Singapore shops, only to be told there were no vacancies. The managements did not say so, of course, but their policy was to pay starvation wages to Eurasian girls whom necessity made humble and grateful for the pittances they received.

Kate's slender funds were beginning to run out and her spirits were low, when there appeared an announcement in the press to the effect that Madame Rosalie had arrived in Singapore and that for one week she would be showing 'the latest creations from Paris and London' in her suite at Raffles Hotel.

Madame Rosalie, whose real name was Jenkins, toured the East every year, leaving England soon after Ascot with the left-overs of the English summer season, bought at bargain prices from manufacturers who had no hope of selling them in Europe, where women's minds would soon be turning to tweeds and furs.

Kate called on Madame Rosalie by appointment. 'What can I do for you, my dear?' asked the latter kindly, wriggling uncomfortably in her stays, with a fan in one hand and a gin *pahit* in the other.

'I want a job, Madame Rosalie,' said Kate, coming straight to the point. 'I haven't any experience, but I'm quick to learn.'

'A girl with your looks and figure, my dear, doesn't need to learn. She's self-taught!' Already Madame Rosalie's agile mind had sensed Kate's commercial possibilities. The faded, beauty-starved women of the Far East, seeing Kate's fresh beauty paraded for them wearing the new finery, would be tempted to greater extravagances. She was a coarse-grained old woman with a heart as kind as she could afford. 'In trouble?' she asked.

'I came out here believing I had a career as a wife,' Kate replied, 'but . . . well, it didn't work out that way.'

'Left waiting at the church, eh? There are worse fates. I wish that lazy loafer Jenkins had left *me* waiting at the church. All right, my dear, you've found yourself a job. You and I will get on well together.'

'What exactly shall I have to do?' asked Kate.

'Just wear pretty clothes and look beautiful. That won't be hard. You couldn't help looking lovely if you tried,' the old woman added wistfully. 'No salary, of course,' she went on, becoming businesslike, 'but all your travelling expenses paid and a commission on sales. We'll go on from here to Hongkong, then on to Shanghai, Kobe and Yokohama and back to England via Calcutta and Bombay. What do you say?'

Kate agreed with alacrity, her eyes filling with tears of pure relief.

'Tears are no good in this business, my dear, nor in any other that I know of. What did you say your name was?'

'Kate Marlowe, Madame Rosalie . . .'

'All right, Kate. Call me Rosie. Better move in here right away, for we've a lot of unpacking to do tonight.'

'I had despaired of ever selling that blue taffeta horror,' said Madame Rosalie at the end of the first day's business in Singapore. 'But that old frump Lady Whatsername was delighted with it. She thinks she's going to look like you did in it. Tell me, Kate, did anyone teach you to wear clothes, or is it just a gift?

If I'd met you a few years ago,' she continued without waiting for a reply, 'we'd both have been living on easy street by now. Lock the door, dear, so's I can take my stays off. This climate's killing me.'

Clad in a loose-fitting robe, her body no longer constricted by the monstrous pressure of her corsets, Madame Rosalie seemed to billow and fall apart. Torn between pity, horror and disgust, Kate watched her now shapeless employer sink wearily into an easy chair, wondering fearfully whether her own firm, slim body would one day have to admit defeat at the hands of age and decay.

'Was I really all right today, Rosie?' asked Kate eagerly, anxious to think of something else.

'You were good, Kate, maybe better than that. In fact, if you'd only learn to be a little nicer to the men, you'd be perfect. You see, my dear, it may be the women who choose and buy the clothes, but it's nearly always the men who pay for them. Take that tall, good-looking old man who came in with his two daughters . . . remember? Well, you must have said something to offend him because he took his daughters by the arm and walked out in high dudgeon. What *did* you say to him?'

'What did he say to *me*? That's more to the point . . . the filthy old beast!'

'Kate, my dear,' said the old woman wearily, 'when you're my age you'll know that men haven't much originality. They're all filthy beasts under their skins . . . filthy beasts with one-track minds which are concentrated between the navel and the knees. It's no good blushing and pretending that it is not so. I *know* men. I really know them. You'll know them too, my girl, or my name isn't Rosalie Jenkins, and if you want to get on in this business, it's the men that need studying. Be nice to them, that's all I ask . . .

'Don't misunderstand me, Kate, or think that I want you to go around sleeping with every man who dangles a fistful of bank-notes under your nose. Hang on to your principles as long as you can, my dear, remembering always that principles are luxuries and there's bound to come a time when you're going

to ask yourself how many luxuries you can afford. We all come to it, my dear, sooner or later. Be nice to them and that's all Rosie asks of you . . . and now ring the bell like a good girl and tell the boy to go on bringing me whiskies and sodas until I tell him to stop. Poor old Rosie needs a drink!'

For the next hours Kate, as a captive audience, was on the receiving end of her employer's alcoholic confidences, most of which went out of her mind as she heard them. Drink to Rosalie Jenkins was, as it had been to Colin, a kind of anaesthetic, under whose influence the ugly realities of life became bearable. Come what may, Kate resolved as she went down to dinner alone, she would always call things by their right names and face what had to be faced without blurring stark outlines with drink.

Rosalie Jenkins, if only because she had lived longer, had a wider, deeper knowledge of the world and its ways, but it was knowledge salvaged from defeat and failure, and Kate, gritting her teeth, resolved that she would not allow the world to defeat her.

It had been a hard day. From ten in the morning until seven in the evening, the sample room of the hotel, transformed into a dress salon, had been crowded with the dowdy *élite* of Hong-kong society. Gowns made originally for Ascot, Lord's and Henley – by then as out of date as yesterday's newspaper – had changed hands at prices higher than when offered to the world of fashion in London months previously. No small part of this success had been due to Kate's beauty and her gift for wearing clothes.

'My dear,' said Madame Rosalie, 'I didn't know there was so much money in Hongkong. You must mesmerize them.'

As Madame Rosalie was dipping her muzzle into the third whisky and soda, a boy came to announce that a lady was on the way upstairs. 'The last customer, thank God, and usually the best!' the other whispered to Kate. 'Be extra nice to her. Gracie, my dear,' she continued, turning to the newcomer, a hard-faced statuesque blonde who had once been a beauty, 'I am

glad to see you. Make yourself comfortable and help yourself to a drink.'

'What have you got for me this trip, Rosie?' said the other, her quick eyes glancing round the room to rest appraisingly on Kate.

'Yours haven't been opened yet, Gracie. Kate will show them to you. Kate, my dear, meet Gracie, a very old friend of mine, and by the way, Gracie, don't get any ideas because Kate's a good girl . . .'

'We all were once, weren't we?' retorted the other lightly. 'And my advice to you, dear,' she added, smiling at Kate, 'is to stay a good girl as long as you can. But if you ever change your mind, come along and talk to me about it.'

Kate was no fool, so it would not be true to say that she was totally unaware of the implications of this backchat, but much of it went over her head. Women such as these were new in her experience. Kate was the product of an age and environment – late Victorian England – in which, in circles which had any pretensions to being polite, few things were called by their right names. Nicely brought up girls suffered agonies in mixed company rather than admit to overlaid bladders and, on the rare occasions when, perhaps to point a moral, fallen women were mentioned, voices were dropped a tone or two to match the fall from grace. It seemed easier to Kate to behave as though she did not understand. Biting her lips with vexation, she set about unpacking a huge theatrical trunk filled with evening gowns.

With a sure hand and without asking the price, Gracie picked out some thirty gowns. 'Send a boy up with these now,' she said, turning to Kate, 'while Rosie and I have a drink and a chat about old times. Later, you'd better come and have dinner with me. You'll get a better meal than you will at this dump.'

'To what address shall I send the gowns?' asked Kate.

'Tell the boy they're to go to Gracie's place, that's enough. Everyone knows Gracie's place, though some of them pretend they don't.'

When she had seen to the dispatch of the gowns, Kate went into her bedroom, a prey to strangely tumultuous thoughts. It

was a long way, not only in miles, from the sheltered calm of rural England to the China Coast where, it seemed, a new set of manners and morals had been evolved. She was profoundly shocked, shaken to the very core, and not the least shocking part of it all was that, despite instinctive disapproval, she found herself liking Gracie. Kate felt that she was blushing all over, the hot blood seeming to stain her face and neck like an indelible dye.

Sitting in front of the mirror, Kate remembered something her father had once said. 'As I see things,' he had said, 'goodness . . . real goodness, cannot be touched by evil, any more than God's sunlight can be clouded by the existence of darkness down a coal-mine. Goodness is real, dear, while badness is nothing, only the absence of goodness. Carry that thought with you always.'

As Kate well knew, he had not been a great man, but he had been a straight and honourable man, kindly in his dealings and tolerant in his judgments. It was comforting to remember him.

Kate knew that she was for the first time in her life hovering upon the fringe of abysmal evil, but she doubted its power to hurt her. When, after a bath and change of clothing, she rejoined the older women, Kate met Gracie's searching, appraising looks so serenely that it was Gracie who dropped her eyes in embarrassment.

Gracie's turnout – a smart victoria drawn by a pair of greys – was waiting outside the hotel. The three women, Kate sitting with back to the coachman, were under the scrutiny of many eyes, most of which were male, when they took the road for a demurely elegant house in Lyndhurst Terrace, whose white-washed steps and polished brass knocker suggested the solid respectability of a quiet Kensington square rather than – Kate had no word for what she suspected it was – a bawdy house on the China Coast.

Kate was inclined to revise this judgment when the door was opened by a benign, middle-aged Chinese who, given breeches and gaiters, would have looked episcopal.

From a downstairs room leading off the hall came the

mechanical thump of a piano played by someone whose heart was not in it. It was a Viennese waltz, listless and heavy, played in such a lack-lustre way that it would not occur to anyone to dance. The door of the room was ajar. Kate peeped into it, amazed to see that, except for the pianist, whose back was to the door, it was empty.

Gracie and Rosalie, without a backward glance, went up the stairs, leaving Kate face-to-face with the Chinese butler, in whose eyes was a look she could not interpret. 'Please,' she said, hearing her voice croak, 'what is this house?'

'That you ask such a question, madam,' came the reply in shocked tones and impeccable English, 'tells me that you should not be here. Come, I will escort you back to the hotel. I have plenty of time. This house does not become busy until decent people are in bed . . .'

'If it is such a bad house,' said Kate with cruel logic, 'why do you work here?'

'Because I am suspected of being a thief and nobody else in Hongkong but Miss Gracie dare employ me. My name is John. I was,' he said, drawing himself up with dignity, 'the butler at Government House.'

'My name is Kate Marlowe, John, and I will never . . . never forget your kindness.'

They walked on in silence until they came in sight of the lighted entrance of the hotel. 'It is better that I leave you here, Miss Marlowe,' said John. 'I am well known in Hongkong . . . too well known. Anyone seeing you with me would not understand. It was wrong, very wrong of Madame Rosalie to take you to that place . . .'

John turned abruptly to retrace his footsteps. Kate, watching until he was out of sight, did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Madame Rosalie returned in the early hours of the morning, full of drunken remorse, wondering at her own depravity and bewildered by the complexity of her motives in having taken Kate to a notorious brothel. Now, in the mood of self-analysis which came with the cold light of the pre-dawn, she realized that it was envy of Kate's radiant innocence, by contrast with

her own spotted way of living, which had aroused her resentment.

When they met later, neither referred to the events of the previous evening. Nor was it ever again mentioned between them.

Word did not take long to circulate in Hongkong that Madame Rosalie, whose reputation in the Far East was somewhat tarnished, had brought with her a girl of such striking loveliness that those who had seen her—even the women—used nothing but superlatives to describe her. Madame Rosalie's reputation being what it was, Hongkong in its worldly wisdom assumed the worst. The best and most widely accepted theory was that the older woman was a procuress and that Kate's employment as a model was to give the whole thing an air of quasi-respectability.

It was unlikely, of course, that Kate would settle for a Hongkong protector. She was going on to Shanghai, a far more important and less censorious place, where there were plenty of rich men who would infallibly compete for her favours. There were rich men in Hongkong too, of course, but to be socially acceptable in a British Crown Colony, they had to be reasonably circumspect.

Men came to the dress shows with their wives and daughters, saw Kate and sighed regretfully, realizing that her spectacular colouring alone made her unattainable in Hongkong, where she would be as conspicuous as a canary among sparrows. But among those who came to see Kate was John Ingleby, a man who occupied a position of such eminence on the China Coast that he could, and did, make his own rules.

The firm of Ingleby & Waters, of which John Ingleby was the head, was one of those fabulous family businesses founded upon the beginnings of the China tea trade at the end of the eighteenth century. Tea gave them little more than bread and butter. The jam and the cake came from the infamous opium trade. So immensely rich and powerful was John Ingleby's grandfather towards the end of the first half of the nineteenth century that

in order to force the Chinese Government to rescind the order banning opium in the Celestial Empire, and to force the China merchants to complete their forward contracts for opium, he was able to lobby the British Government into declaring war – the Opium War, as it is called in the few history books which have not censored it – against China.

When John Ingleby saw Kate, he knew in a curiously twisted way that if his own image of himself were to survive he must possess her. It went deeper than that. A few months short of his forty-eighth birthday, Kate represented to him, in a way he would have found hard to rationalize, the extension of his own lost youth.

Three

Written on the notepaper of the Hongkong Club, date illegible, but ending in '03: 'Dear Miss Marlowe: I understand you are leaving H'kong to-morrow and I cannot let you leave without an effort to correct your bad opinion of me. Do please accept this trifle as an earnest of my contrition and of your forgiveness of my outrageous rudeness.

JOHN INGLEBY'

THERE HAS survived in a private letter, written from Canton in 1834, a contemporary view of Cowan Ingleby, the founder of the firm of Ingleby & Waters. The writer said:

If one can forget, and I am half ashamed that I can so forget, that Cowan Ingleby has amassed his vast fortune by corrupting the minds and bodies of tens of millions of Chinese, he is an amazingly nice fellow.

Others may well have written in similar strain about Cowan Ingleby's grandson, John, about whom was none of the taint of opium. He too was an amazingly nice fellow in most ways. He wore his great wealth quietly and without ostentation. If he were ever other than straight in his business dealings, evidence of it is lacking. He was one of the best amateur jockeys the China Coast has ever seen, and consistently wore his triumphs modestly. Unlike the rich English families who founded their fortunes in the slave trade and have done everything possible since to destroy the evidence of their forbears' infamy, John Ingleby never sought to minimize the harm done by his. 'A lot of things were done then that aren't done now,' he would say.

John Ingleby's chief failing was a private one, in so far as anything on the China Coast was private. Nor, in justice, can he be blamed for it. John was one of four brothers whose father,

for reasons which can now only be a matter for conjecture, had an obsessive fear of venereal disease. His theory – and the logic of it seems sound – was that the surest way to keep young men away from diseased women was to make available a plentiful supply of clean women.

In Shanghai, where the family went to live, was a Chinese comprador whose sole function was to provide an unending supply of virgins – ‘first-time pieces’ was the cant term in the trade – for the delectation of the Ingleby boys. The result of this was that, at an age when most youngsters were occupied with bird-nesting, trains and breaking windows with catapults, John and his brothers were already steeped in venerery. A further complication was that the virgins brought down the river for their amusement were seldom more than twelve to thirteen years of age, with the result that the Inglebys tended to regard any woman over fifteen as an old hag. It was not an expensive hobby. Surplus girl babies, packed comfortably into floating cradles, were set adrift and abandoned all down the Yangtze Valley in hard times, or they could be bought for between fifty cents and two dollars a head.

Leaving aside all moral considerations, this system of upbringing was workable enough in China, which spawned millions of unwanted females every year. Even for the ‘first-time pieces’ it was a better fate than drowning. But the defects of the system were shown up into harsh relief in the greater – and more censorious – world outside China. The brothers became involved in unpleasant incidents in England and elsewhere where public opinion held that little girls should be allowed to play with dolls.

As a result of one of these incidents at Oxford, John Ingleby, deeply shocked by the narrow-mindedness of everyone concerned, abandoned higher education for business and sailed for China by the next available ship. In due course he married, but, in the metaphor of a later age, the marriage did not ‘jell’. Edith Ingleby could not regard her husband’s little peculiarities leniently, so they went their several ways, appearing together in public occasionally to observe the decencies.

This was the John Ingleby who, with Kate Marlowe’s fresh

loveliness standing between him and his sleep, set to work to possess her. With three generations of the Arabian Nights kind of wealth behind him, plus a tradition of Oriental magnificence to maintain 'face' in Chinese eyes, he would not have been human if he had not tended to regard all problems as soluble in terms of money.

The key to the possession of Kate Marlowe was, obviously, Rosalie Jenkins, whose venality was written all over her raddled face. It was to her, therefore, that John Ingleby addressed himself, with no beating about the bush or attempts at subtlety. 'Madame Rosalie,' he said without preamble, 'I am, as you may know, a rich man. I am accustomed to paying . . . paying generously for what I want . . .'

'What is it that you want, Mr Ingleby?' asked Rosalie Jenkins tremulously. She knew what he wanted, of course, but it seemed more genteel not to appear to know.

'I want . . . I need the young woman in your employ. Kate Marlowe, I believe, is her name. I've come here to ask your help.'

'My help . . . ?' she faltered.

'Yes, your help.'

'I hardly know what you mean, Mr Ingleby, or understand quite what you have in mind . . .'

'Forgive my bluntness, Madame Rosalie, but I prefer to speak plainly, and I find it hard to believe that you, an intimate of my friend, Gracie, who is . . . let us not mince words . . . a brothel-keeper, can fail to take my meaning. In return for your help, I will give you a sum of money which will enable you to retire from a mode of life which cannot get easier or more pleasant as the years pass. I am offering you complete financial independence for life, Madame Rosalie. Is that plain enough? Will you help?'

'You leave me no choice, Mr Ingleby.'

'Where Miss Marlowe is concerned,' he went on, 'I will be more generous than you could possibly imagine.'

'I am sure of that,' said Rosalie Jenkins miserably, for stripped of her pretensions she felt naked. 'Yes, I will help you. Kate is a sweet girl, Mr Ingleby, and much as I shall miss her, I could not stand in her way.'

'Your high motives do you credit, madam,' he said with ill-concealed irony.

'It is all very well for you to talk like that,' said the other, wincing, 'but what would become of me . . . with your influence working against me?'

'You know perfectly well, Madame Rosalie,' he said icily, determined not to let her shelter behind such a statement, 'that whether you help me or not, I would not use such influence as I may have against you. If you become my accomplice in this matter, it will be because, like the rest of humanity, you are greedy for money, and if you won't become my accomplice . . . yes, accomplice is the word . . . I shall find some other way to get what I want. So, which is it to be?'

'I will help you,' said the wretched woman, wishing that from somewhere she could summon the courage to resist the temptation dangled before her.

Rosalie Jenkins, as has been made plain, was no puritan. She lived by a lax code, but not so lax, as yet, that it had allowed her to become a procuress which, stripped of all euphemisms, was what she now proposed to be.

The tired old woman let her mind dwell for a moment on the ugly vista of the years ahead, the dreary round of sweltering, uncomfortable journeys by ship and train, the endless packing and unpacking of trunks in frowsy hotel rooms and the long hours of forced smiles, tightly corseted in order to preserve some semblance of human shape, suffering agonies from the constriction of tight shoes. She could not face it.

'You will not regret your decision,' said Ingleby, taking his leave. 'You will be hearing from me.'

For the next hour or so, before she again saw Kate, Rosalie Jenkins struggled to evolve a formula which would enable her to see herself as the younger woman's benefactress, so that the thieves' compact she had made with John Ingleby could be made to smell sweeter. 'You will be flattered to know, Kate,' she said over dinner that evening, 'that you have another admirer . . .'

'Well, I hope he's an improvement on the others I've met in the East.'

'He is that, my dear. He's one of the handsomest and probably the richest Englishman on the China Coast. His name is John Ingleby, a charming man.'

'How is it that such a paragon is still unattached?' asked Kate.

'Well, he isn't exactly unattached, dear. But Mrs Ingleby spends most of her time in Europe . . .'

'I see,' said Kate bitterly. 'He just wants someone to console him until she returns from Europe, is that it?'

'You know, Kate, my dear, you really do have a way of twisting things and putting the worst construction on them. At least don't condemn the man until you've met him. He's going to join us for coffee and liqueurs, by the way.'

'No, Rosie, he's going to join *you* for coffee and liqueurs. I'm tired of having men whisper disgusting things to me. Good night!'

As Kate, head held very high, left the hotel dining-room by the main door, it was John Ingleby who held it open for her, watching wet-lipped as she crossed the lobby. She looked even lovelier in anger than she had when smiling for Madame Rosalie's customers. He knew then that he was capable of any folly to possess her. 'Miss Marlowe!' he called to her as she put her foot on the bottom stair. Kate turned, saw him come quickly towards her, and squared herself to face him. 'Well, what do you want?' she asked uncompromisingly.

'I want you!' he said in a whisper and then took a pace backwards, unable to face the blazing indignation he saw in her eyes before she went up the stairs.

Kate had never been such a ninny as to suppose that men were indifferent to a beautiful body and face, for since her early 'teens she had grown used to the swift glances which men – all kinds of men of all ages – cast at her. She had known that in this interest there was – human nature being in part animal – an element of lust. Nor, when she thought of this, was it altogether and necessarily horrible. But where she seemed to have gone wrong in her thinking was in supposing that men ever thought of anything else but their lusts. Thus far, since she had left the protection of her husband, the only man to treat her with respect

and not seek to use her as a plaything had been John, the tragicomic Chinese butler of a brothel.

Kate remembered having seen John Ingleby at the dress show, remembered too having thought him a cut above the other men who had trailed in with their womenfolk. But, it seemed, he was like all the rest. Not even the charmingly worded note of apology which arrived the next day with a diamond and emerald bracelet made Kate feel more kindly disposed.

Four

*Item from the Memory Box: A note which reads:
'More than 300 years ago, a patient craftsman, who
had seen hair like yours in a dream, carved this
spray of fern for you from one piece of jade. Do not
disappoint him, lovely Singapore Kate, but wear it
for me at dinner tomorrow night.*

GORDON MAITLAND'

THE SUITE which Kate and Rosalie Jenkins occupied for the short journey north from Hongkong to Shanghai – costing five times what they had paid for two tiny cabins below the water-line – was ablaze with flowers. Asking at the purser's office whether there had not been a mistake, the two women were told: 'We had our instructions from the Hongkong office. I'm afraid that's all I know.'

If the purser had known of John Ingleby's interest in Kate, he would have understood, for the latter was a director of the company owning the vessel, while Ingleby & Waters were the company's agents on the China Coast.

This short sea journey, although Kate did not realize it at the time, was a landmark in her life, being the first experience she had ever had of real luxury. She had hardly met anyone in England who did not suffer from chilblains. Nor had she until then ever seen hot water come out of a tap. She guessed, of course, that somewhere behind it was John Ingleby, but it would have been petty to pitch the flowers overboard and foolish to have refused to occupy the suite so, wisely, Kate set out to enjoy the trip. She was catching a glimpse of something she had not yet recognized for what it was: the world of the very rich, where nobody stops to count the cost of anything.

Rosalie Jenkins was deeply shocked when Kate, opening the flat package which accompanied John Ingleby's note of apology, handed it back to the messenger who brought it aboard the ship.

It had contained a diamond and emerald bracelet. 'You're being very foolish and short-sighted, my girl,' she said. 'A time will come when nobody will send you diamonds and emeralds and then you'll be sorry you didn't keep these. Emeralds would suit your colouring beautifully. Besides, it's a good sound principle never to refuse anything a man offers you . . . except promises, especially promises made at night, when the banks are closed.'

'All right, Rosie,' said Kate, laughing, 'you stick to your principles and I'll stick to mine. Tell me about Shanghai, please.'

'You thought Hongkong wicked, my dear,' said the older woman, launching into her story with zest, 'but by comparison with Shanghai, let me tell you, Hongkong is like a tea-party on the vicarage lawn. Shanghai's as flat as a pancake and the ugliest place I was ever in. You roast in summer and you freeze in winter. But it's the most glamorous and exciting place I know and I love it. By the way,' she added, thinking of the little cottage beside the Thames where she planned to end her days, 'John Ingleby lives in Shanghai.'

Kate ignored this last and the other continued: 'Shanghai has everything . . . the good and the bad . . . anyway, everything except culture. We can live without museums and art galleries. At least, I can. You'll love Shanghai, Kate. You'll see. If you're as smart as I think you are under all that big act of yours, you'll own Shanghai some day. It's just waiting for someone like you.'

For the three days which followed, Rosalie Jenkins did not produce much in the way of conversation, for among the courtesies which went with the best suite in the ship was unlimited drink 'on the house'. Instructions had been given to the chief steward not to present a bill.

At the reception desk of the Kalee Hotel, where Madame Rosalie's dress shows were always held in a first-floor salon, there occurred a meeting which in the years to come Kate would regard as the most significant of her life.

While the older woman was signing the register, which she usually did for both of them, an acquaintance spoke to her, dis-

tracting her attention just when she had started to write Kate's name. The entry in the register read: 'Mrs R. Jenkins and Kate.' There was no surname.

Kate, meanwhile, was sorting out the huge pile of baggage they had brought, arranging for the big trunks containing the stock in trade to go to the showroom, Rosalie Jenkins's private baggage to go to one bedroom and her own to the other. While she was doing this, she saw a young man, tall, with a pleasingly ugly, craggy face and eyes which twinkled with good humour, walk to the desk to scrutinize the entry. He read it with a puzzled air and, crossing to where Kate was dealing with the baggage, said with a grin: 'Haven't you got a name? Just Kate, nothing else?'

'These are mine,' said Kate to the boy, ignoring the interruption, indicating her steamer trunk and two smaller cases, from which the name labels had by pure accident been removed. All they revealed was a large label which read: 'Passenger to SINGAPORE.'

'Well, that's all right,' said the young man, quite unabashed, 'what's in a name anyway? I shall call you Singapore Kate . . . pretty name, easy to remember. Welcome to Shanghai, Singapore Kate!'

Winged words, lightly uttered to be as quickly forgotten. But they were not forgotten and, almost from the hour they were uttered, they became the essential part of a legend, its very foundation.

Late that evening a messenger delivered a package and a letter. The package contained what seemed to be a spray of maiden-hair fern.

'I've no patience with you, Kate,' said Rosalie Jenkins angrily at the end of the first day's business in Shanghai. 'You insult rich men who try to be nice to you . . . look at the way you treated poor Mr Ingleby . . . yet you're prepared to go out to dinner with a nobody who picked you up in the lobby of the hotel. I've made inquiries about this Gordon Maitland. He's a

broker who hasn't two cents to bless himself with. Why waste your time on him?'

'Because he is a man with nice thoughts. That's why, Rosie. Did you ever see anything so lovely as this carved jade maiden-hair fern?' asked Kate, arranging it on her burnished copper hair and admiring it in the mirror.

'Don't fool yourself, my dear! It's the hair that's lovely. Try the jade on me and see what it looks like! Jade is green and green's your colour. That's why Mr Ingleby sent you diamonds and emeralds . . . they're green, too.'

'Maybe, but what did he want in exchange?' retorted Kate sharply.

'The same thing that this man Maitland wants . . . that they all want . . .'

'Shut up, Rosie! Anything can be made to sound beastly if you try. Please don't spoil this evening for me.'

'Very well, my dear. Enjoy yourself, but don't let him get you into a double rickshaw. They're more dangerous than hansom cabs . . . and I know what I'm talking about.'

As a special concession, Kate had borrowed from stock a paddy-green satin gown in which she looked spectacularly beautiful. Pouring herself another drink, Rosalie Jenkins stood back admiringly. 'You'll be a sensation, my dear,' she said, tears of emotion dimming her eyes. 'Don't forget to let them all know that you're wearing one of Madame Rosalie's gowns. Then, if it does get damaged while you're fighting for your honour, the advertisement will be worth it.'

The old woman sighed deeply when she was alone. There had not been much of beauty in her life for a long time until Kate entered it. She was growing fond of Kate in her fashion, which made it all the harder to do what she planned to do. John Ingleby had thrown her a lifeline and she dare not . . . must not . . . let it drift by. But what the hell, she mused, pouring herself another drink to stifle the stirrings of conscience. A girl with Kate's looks was bound, in the nature of things, to pop in and out of a lot of beds. Well, nobody knew better than old Rosie that a girl didn't find much except crumbs in a poor man's

bed. She was scared of this Gordon Maitland, who was the handsome, swashbuckling type that girls fell for, but no good as a long-term proposition. Before she weakened, she wrote a letter to John Ingleby, telling him it might be as well not to delay too long his arrival in Shanghai. While still sober enough to walk, she went down into the hotel lobby to post it. 'Not yet, maybe, but one of these days you'll thank me, Kate,' she mumbled.

Five

From the Memory Box:

M E N U

Chen's Soochow Restaurant

*Lake Ta-hu Mandarin Fish with
Hangchow Prawn Stuffing*

*Roast Ningpo Sucking Pig, Bamboo
Shoots, Sweet & Sour Sauce*

Tarte en Surprise Singapore Kate

Coffee

*Across the menu card, tattered with much handling,
is written in Kate's unmistakable scrawl: 'The
happiest evening and the best dinner of my life.'*

CHEN'S SOOCHOW Restaurant stood on the corner of a narrow street in the French Concession, facing an unmade road soon to be called Avenue Edouard VII. There were only eight tables, the space between them being such that ordinary conversation was not audible from table to table. The other tables were occupied when Gordon Maitland led Kate to theirs. People went to Chen's to eat, not for music, or because it was smart, only for the food and the gentle, beaming welcome in Chen's fleshy smile. Kate, who had been working all day without food, was hungry.

Chen could not keep his eyes off Kate's hair, or the spray of jade maidenhair fern, which he recognized at once for what it was. It would be dangerous, he warned Kate, to wear it in China proper, outside the International Settlement or French Concession, because, like much of China's finest craftsmanship, it

was still an Imperial monopoly. It was almost certainly loot acquired in the sacking of Peking during and after the Boxer troubles.

'This is,' Kate told Gordon Maitland, 'though you may not believe it, the first time I have gone out to dinner with a man . . .'

It was true, for Colin had eaten with her aboard ship and in hotels, but he had never taken her *out*.

'Then I must behave even better than I planned to behave,' he said, moving his chair an inch farther from hers.

These two were taking stock of each other, warily, like two wrestlers circling in the ring. Kate was drawn to Gordon, but frightened to let down any of the barriers of caution, lest he became like all the other men she had encountered in the Far East. Gordon was cautious, too, because Kate was something new in his experience. It seemed impossible in the worldly atmosphere of Shanghai that Kate should be as sweet and unspoiled as she seemed. He was, much against his will, falling in love. In the kind of life he led there was no room for domesticity. As a bullion broker, he was always on the job, for the competition was fierce. The days were spent making himself useful to his slender list of clients, while the evenings were dedicated to expanding the list. Half of him was ready to fall down and worship Kate, but the adventurer in him wanted to be free.

Taking leave of the beaming Chen, they drove slowly to the French Club, where there was a ball in aid of some worthy cause. There were two orchestras, one Portuguese, from Macao and Goa, and the other lent for the occasion by the Messageries Maritimes liner lying in the river.

Kate and Gordon made their entrance late, when the ball was in full swing. The French orchestra was playing a dreamy waltz as they came out on to the floor. It seemed to fall to pieces for a few seconds when, following the direction of the leader's gaze, its members looked goggle-eyed at Kate as she swung in Gordon's arms, waiting for them to pick up the rhythm again.

'Because of you, Kate,' said Gordon later, 'I'm the most popular man in Shanghai tonight. Men who cut me in the street want to buy us champagne.'

'They frighten me, Gordon,' she whispered. 'They have a kind of glitter in their eyes. It becomes bright and set when they stare at me.'

'It's your fault, sweet Kate, for being so beautiful. I'll keep them at bay, but I can't find it in my heart to blame them.'

But worse than the men were the women, who could not fail to see what Kate did to their menfolk. They looked at her appraisingly at first, then with envy, hatred and malice plainly written across their faces. European women aged quickly in the East, partly because of the heat and humidity, but mostly because, in China particularly, they did not have enough to do. They were served like queens. Their faces soon took on the marks of the lazy, useless, vapid lives they led. Then, when Kate appeared on the floor, a hundred or more men, as though a signal had been given, squared their shoulders and adjusted the set of their white ties. This passed over Kate's head, but to the other women it was tantamount to a declaration of war. They would never forgive her.

Kate was too happy to sense the malice around her. She was beginning to grasp the sense of power which great beauty gave to a woman. The glint of lust she read in the eyes of men no longer frightened her. It was a manifestation of something natural, a weakness in men for which they were to be pitied, not hated. A dapper little Belgian banker, briefly escaping from his wife's vigilance, pressed a visiting-card into Kate's hand and whispered: 'One thousand dollars, hein?'

But the wife, coming up behind, heard it and made a scene. Gordon was ready to commit mayhem when he learned the facts, but Kate said, not intending others to hear: 'No, Gordon, leave the silly little man alone. That woman's tongue will be enough punishment for him.'

They danced through until dawn. Before the carriage dropped them at the Kalee Hotel, Gordon was ready to abandon his lone wolf status, believing that life without Kate would be unendurable. 'I love you, sweet Kate,' he said, 'and I think I shall love you until I die.'

A shadow crossed his eyes as he spoke. It was as though a strange prescience had told him it was true.

In the Memory Box there was a dance programme which probably related to that evening. It bore the imprint of the French Club. It was a tiny book, two dances to a page, the pencil attached by a white silk cord. Across every page of the book appeared the initials 'G.M.' written with such determination that on some pages the paper was slightly torn by the pressure of the pencil. Let him who dare, it seemed to say, poach on my preserves.

Although Kate had little more than an hour's sleep, she was singing happily when the first of a record number of customers came to the salon. As Rosalie Jenkins had been quick to realize, Kate's sensational appearance in the borrowed paddy-green gown was the best possible advertisement for her wares. 'Borrow the royal blue taffeta tonight, my dear,' said Rosalie Jenkins. 'When they see you in that, poor souls, they'll clear out the entire stock, saving us the trouble of going on to Kobe and Yokohama. I'm tired of it, Kate, sick and tired of it,' she said brokenly. 'I once saw an old cab horse just at the moment when he'd run out of courage. Suddenly, and for no reason I could see, he quit. He became like a watch without a mainspring. I think of that old horse a lot, Kate, because I'm like he was . . . running out of courage.'

'It's a bad way to be, Kate,' the old woman continued, her voice dropping to a whisper, 'because courage isn't the only thing you run short of . . . when the time comes. You run out of decency, too . . . do things you'd never have dreamed of doing . . . before.'

Before what? What was it that old Rosie had done, or was planning to do, that seemed to weigh on her conscience? Probably nothing, Kate decided. She drank too much, that was all, and in the mornings suffered from a bad liver, which she mistook for remorse.

Later that morning, Rosalie Jenkins paid Kate in cash the accumulated commissions due to her from sales in Singapore and Hongkong. It amounted to some four hundred dollars . . .

Mexican, of course. On Shanghai sales, Kate calculated, as much again was already due. The first thing to do, she decided, was to put the money in a safe place. Her experience in Singapore *had been frightening, watching day by day as her small savings* melted away, with no other source of money in sight. On the day that Kate had seen the name of Colin Wilder in a list of passengers sailing for Australia, which was two or three days before she met Rosalie Jenkins, less than £20 stood between her and destitution. Colin's departure had had little practical significance, for it would have been waste of time looking to him for support, but it had emphasized her utter aloneness.

During the lunch-hour lull, Kate stopped at the hotel cashier's desk. 'Would you please advise me which is the safest bank in Shanghai?' she asked, realizing how absurd it must sound.

'Many banks in Shanghai, missee. Bank of China is safe. Other Chinese banks not so safe. There is Belgian bank, two French banks, Dutch bank and maybe six British banks. Best one is Anglo-Chinese bank. Big building on the Bund.'

It was on this advice that Kate walked towards the Bund and into the palatial premises of the Anglo-Chinese & Far Eastern Bank to open an account and deposit her hard-earned commissions. During the lunch hour there was a crowd, compelling Kate to wait in a long line of people, mostly Chinese.

After she had been standing in line for some fifteen minutes, Mr Charles Borbridge, the General Manager of the bank, emerged from his private office for lunch. The first thing he saw was Kate, whose hair stood out like a beacon light against the subdued drabness of clerkly Chinese attire. He had not yet seen her youth and beauty, so it was chivalry of a kind which prompted him to go to her assistance. 'My dear young lady,' he said, 'if you will come with me I will see that someone attends to you at once.'

Mr Borbridge was quite sure, as he went on his way to lunch, that never in his life had he met such a lovely and charming young woman as the Miss Kate Marlowe for whom he had just opened an account. 'If you ever require any help, or advice, Miss Marlowe,' he had said in his heavy avuncular fashion, 'do not

hesitate to call on me. That's what I am here for, you **know.**'

Nevertheless, the number of persons with small accounts who were given personal attention by Mr Charles Borbridge *was not large.*

Six

A letter, torn in sixteen pieces and mounted on a sheet of paper bearing the imprint of The Broadway Hotel, Shanghai.

My darling: The opportunity I have been looking for has come my way. I catch this afternoon's Hankow boat. Will write full details. If this turns out as expected, we can get married.

G.M.

JOHN INGLEBY was in a fever of anxiety as he stepped ashore. Reading between the lines of the smudged letter which Rosalie Jenkins had written him under the influence of drink and an anxiety no less acute than his own, he feared the worst. On the voyage up the coast from Hongkong there had been plenty of time to consider what had to be done and how to do it. He had it all planned down to the last detail.

If what the old woman said was true – and Ingleby did not think she would dare to lie – the danger was Gordon Maitland, of whose existence – on such different planes did they live – he was no more than vaguely aware. He did not even know how the young man earned his living, but would soon find out.

Within fifteen minutes of arriving at his desk, Ingleby knew as much as he needed to know about Gordon Maitland. Calling in a department head, he gave concise instructions, the gist of which was that if Gordon Maitland were prepared to catch that evening's ship for Hankow, the firm of Ingleby & Waters – not John Ingleby – would entrust him with certain important and lucrative business. Not only did Maitland need the money, but he needed even more the prestige which would accrue to him through acting for Ingleby & Waters who, as everyone on the China Coast knew, could pick and choose. It was inconceivable, therefore, that Maitland, who was known to be in financial low water, would do anything but accept the offer.

With Maitland out of the way for a few weeks, the rest, or so John Ingleby believed, would be easy. There might be obstacles, but these would have to be swept away. There had been time since Kate had left Hongkong to realize how vitally necessary she had become to him. He did not dignify what he felt by calling it love, but whatever it was, it was causing him to neglect his work and his play. Because of Kate – or that is how he liked to see it – he had nearly broken his neck in Hongkong. Through sheer absent-mindedness and carelessness, while riding the favourite in a race that he should have won with ease, the image of Kate had come between him and what he was doing. As a result, he had been thrown heavily. That the field had ridden over him without one of the flying hooves touching him, had been pure luck.

When, at six o'clock that same evening, word reached Ingleby that Maitland had sailed for Hankow, he felt better.

There was nothing godlike about Rosalie Jenkins, who lay on the red plush settee of the dress salon snoring peacefully and dreaming of the day, not far distant, when as a woman of leisure she would put travelling behind her for ever. A cottage, a cat, a few old cronies, a little wine for the stomach's sake and, hovering over the scene was the handsome, elegant, immensely rich John Ingleby, by whose beneficence these things would be possible. No, there was nothing remotely godlike about the way her body billowed where the *négligé* revealed things better hidden, or about the false teeth which were coming adrift. Yet in the hour which lay ahead, this wreck of what had once been an alert, vigorous woman was going to usurp the functions of the gods. Because of what she was about to do, at least three lives were about to be blasted and ruined beyond all hope of repair.

There came a gentle tap at the door.

'Go away!' she called, angry at being awakened and hoping to go back to dreamland, where it was possible to compromise with realities.

Interpreting this as 'Come in!' a young Chinese clerk opened the door, dodging an empty bottle which Rosalie Jenkins hurled at him. The young man had a letter in his hand. Leaving it conspicuously on the table, he fled.

Rosalie Jenkins, despairing of being able to go back to sleep and now wide awake, inspected the letter, which was addressed to Miss Kate Marlowe. She recognized the handwriting as that of Gordon Maitland, whom she now regarded as a one-man conspiracy to cheat her of a comfortable old age.

Several other letters addressed in the same hand had been steamed open and their contents read, but there was no time for that now. With trembling hands the raddled old woman ripped open the envelope, read the letter and, quick to seize the opportunity it presented, tore it into sixteen pieces, placing the pieces for safety in an inner pocket of her handbag for later disposal. It was none too soon for, as she was concealing the evidence of her duplicity, she heard Kate's footsteps in the next room.

'You look pleased about something, Rosie,' said Kate a moment or two later. 'You look like the cat that found the cream.'

'Just had some good news, dear,' mumbled the other, vanishing into the bedroom to repair the ravages of time. 'Maybe poor old Rosie's going to get her old age pension after all!'

'At the rate you've been coining money in Shanghai, you won't need one. They've cleaned out almost the entire stock,' said Kate happily. It had been a fortunate day when she first met Rosie in Singapore. Anyway, that was how it seemed and would continue to seem for a little longer.

It is small wonder that the workings of Providence are called inscrutable.

When the last customer had gone, Rosalie Jenkins went down to the lounge of the hotel where, according to the note she had received, she would find John Ingleby. He was there, trying to look inconspicuous behind an evening paper. The Kalee was one of the second flight hotels, where he looked and felt out of

place. 'Well, what news have you for me?' Ingleby began abruptly.

'Plenty and all of it good,' was the ingratiating reply. 'Young Maitland is out of the way . . . gone up to Hankow . . .'

'I knew that a long time ago,' said Ingleby, without revealing that he had been instrumental in sending him there. 'What else?'

'Kate doesn't know about it yet, Mr Ingleby. He wrote her a letter which I . . . well, it seemed better from every point of view that it did not reach her . . .'

'And?'

'Kate is expecting him to call for her at eight o'clock,' said Rosalie Jenkins slyly. 'As you and I both know, Mr Ingleby, he won't arrive. Maybe it would be a good idea if Kate were to kick her heels waiting for him for, say, twenty minutes or so. Not more, because Kate is a quick-tempered girl. Then if you just happened to arrive about the time when she was beginning to boil at being kept waiting . . .' She left the sentence unfinished. It was so obvious that he might think it rude of her to complete it.

'Very well, I'll do just that. And now, I'm sure you agree, the less you and I are seen together, the better. Keep me informed, especially regarding anything Miss Marlowe may say about this evening . . . and don't worry, I won't forget our bargain.'

When at a few minutes past eight Kate entered the hotel lobby, she looked around quickly for Gordon Maitland and, not seeing him, went into the lounge, which was occupied by two men engaged in quiet conversation. One of these she recognized as John Ingleby, who seemed not to see her.

Kate had no strong feelings where Ingleby was concerned. As a woman she remembered with renewed pleasure the glorious flowers which had been put into the suite aboard the mailboat from Hongkong to Shanghai, because it was the kind of gesture which no woman ever forgets. The flowers had in some

strange way palliated the other gesture. The indignation arising from the diamond and emerald bracelet incident had faded. Kate did not regret having refused to accept it. It was just simply that the sting of it had gone and on the rare occasions when Ingleby's name and personality had crossed her mind at all, it had been the flowers rather than the bracelet which had come more easily to mind. At least he had not been guilty of whispering insulting proposals to her like the other men in the Far East. Even now Kate sometimes blushed when she remembered the appalling things they had said.

Ingleby, like the good horseman that he was, waited until Kate's right foot began to tap on the floor at an accelerated *tempo* as a measure of her impatience at being kept waiting. To have acted sooner would have been to invite a snub, while to have waited longer would have been to risk an explosion. Kate was, as Rosalie Jenkins had implied, a high-spirited girl.

Ingleby, who had been holding the other man in conversation as a convenience, let him go when he deemed that Kate was near boiling-point. Then, and for the first time, he appeared to see her. 'What a pleasant surprise on my first evening back in Shanghai!' he said warmly. 'Are you waiting for someone?'

'Yes,' she replied with a flash of annoyance, 'and the appointment was for eight o'clock and it's now just twenty-five past.'

'Your appointment must be with a woman, Miss Marlowe, because I'm sure no man would be so foolish as to keep you waiting.'

'As it happens, you are wrong, Mr Ingleby. But thank you for the compliment just the same. Now I am here, I shall wait five more minutes, but not a second longer.'

'Would it be too much to hope that at the half-hour you would let me be a substitute host for the foolish man who has made you wait?'

Kate bit her lip.

'I can offer you the best dinner to be obtained East of Suez and, as an added inducement, I promise not to give you diamond and emerald bracelets. What do you say, Miss Marlowe?'

Kate delayed replying for a few seconds and it was a combination of three things which made her decide to accept. First, of course, was annoyance with Gordon Maitland, who might at least have sent a message. Then there was the thought that John Ingleby, now that he knew she was not the kind of girl to accept gifts of jewellery from strange men, was a pleasant, well-poised man of the world, who might help to teach Gordon a lesson.

The last reason for Kate's acceptance was more subtle. From somewhere she felt that she had gained a new strength. Men no longer scared and disgusted her. She did not like the way most of them behaved towards an attractive young woman who was unprotected, but she believed that she could deal with them. They all seemed to use the same techniques and showed no originality in anything they said, as though they had learned it all from a primer for predatory males.

'Thank you, I would like to, Mr Ingleby. The best dinner East of Suez sounds good to me, especially as I've eaten nothing since breakfast.'

The smart Ingleby victoria turned out of Kiangse Road into the Nanking Road towards the race-course. It was all gay and brightly lit. But at the North Honan Road intersection, where they turned right, was a different and, to Kate, sinister world of dimly lit interiors, pungent exotic smells. In a few minutes, past Shanghai North railway station, they crossed the line which divided the International Settlement from Chapei, which was in China proper, where the International jurisdiction did not run.

Here flourished villainies too dark and deep even for the case-hardened consciences of cosmopolitan Shanghai.

At the approach of the carriage lights, furtive figures slid away into the shadows. From time to time, sharp and acrid, the smell of opium smoke filtered through the cracks in closed shutters. Wherever there were lights, the better to expose their sores, beggars gathered whining piteously, while alongside the carriage, eyes deeply sunk in their sockets, ran barefoot children, emaciated and joyless, ready to pounce like wild creatures on

anything which could be converted into money and food. As the road narrowed, the coachman flicked his whip lightly around the bare legs, for he was scared of running down one of these waifs of the night and calling down upon himself the anger of the people. The Boxer Rebellion fresh in their minds, the Chinese blamed foreigners – and rightly so – for most of their troubles.

‘I’m frightened,’ said Kate, wondering whether she were being abducted, then gagging as the hideous stench from a sewage cart struck their nostrils with almost the force of a blow.

‘Don’t worry,’ said Ingleby calmly, ‘we shall be there in a moment. A big part of the charm of this place is the vivid contrasts . . . inside and out. It is an ugly aspect of human nature, you know, that to extract the ultimate pleasure from luxury we need the contrast between our own good fortune . . . and those less fortunate.’

‘Is that how you think, Mr Ingleby?’

‘Of course not,’ he snapped. ‘Thought doesn’t enter into the matter. It is an instinctive human reaction, especially in China, which is the land of contrasts. There are restaurants here in Chapei where rich Chinese eat in full view of a press of beggars and hungry children outside. They are open in summer and glassed in in winter, and you may believe me that it is the little noses pressed against the glass which provide the sharpest spur to the appetites within. Not pretty, but true.’

A few seconds later, the carriage drew up at a door from which came the strains of Tchaikovsky’s *Serenata*, played by a more than ordinarily good string band.

The *Casa de Sevilla*, or, as it was universally known in Shanghai, The Wheel, was what would have been called in later years a super-de-luxe gambling hell. Its proprietor, Carlos Brentana, was said to be the son of a Polish courtesan by a Spanish diplomat. His birthplace was Bucharest. All that was known of him with any real certainty was that he had once served in the French Foreign Legion, and even this would not have been known if he had not been recognized and claimed publicly by an ex-legionary passing through Shanghai.

For the rest, Carlos Brentana was a big mystery. He maintained the best band in Shanghai and paid his *chef* a bigger salary than that paid to the British Consul-General, who was the best-paid foreign representative in the city. He maintained a fleet of luxurious carriages for the free conveyance of his patrons to and from the International Settlement and French Concession, and kept on the premises what was by general consent the finest stock of vintage wines, old brandies and Cuban cigars anywhere East of Suez, with the possible exception of the Bengal Club in Calcutta.

The oval Chinese carpet in the gambling-room weighed over five tons and was woven in one piece, representing the work of more than a hundred weavers for two years. All these amenities . . . the fine food, wines and cigars . . . were available to patrons free of any charge whatsoever. All that Carlos Brentana asked of them was that they came in formal evening attire, refrained from fighting on the premises, observed some decorum and honoured their gambling obligations. He did not even make it a condition that they gambled, although freeloaders who did not gamble were not welcomed with great cordiality.

Probably the most surprising thing about Carlos Brentana was that the gambling was strictly honest. Games of chance were just that. The same could not be said of all his patrons. Everything was tried at the *Casa de Sevilla* . . . once. In addition to roulette and baccarat, there was a poker-room. At the smaller tables there was a percentage of every winning pot taken for the house, but at the big table, where the stakes were sometimes hair-raising, Brentana, or one of his representatives, sat in the game. Brentana was a brilliant poker player: cold, deadly and merciless. Legend credited him with some enormous wins. When on one occasion he exposed a card-sharp, who had fleeced the patrons of thousands, Brentana personally broke every one of the man's fingers before ejecting him.

When Ingleby, with Kate on his arm wearing the paddy-green gown she had worn at the French Club ball, made their entrance, it was sensational. Ingleby was a strikingly handsome man in his own right. Carlos Brentana in person – a rare honour – came

forward to greet them. His respect for Ingleby was that of one good gambler for another. Although unaware of it himself, Ingleby had once almost broken Brentana at the no-limit baccarat table.

'The caviar is perfect tonight, Mr Ingleby,' said Brentana, escorting them to the dining-room.

'Thank you,' said Ingleby, 'and for the rest, what you yourself are going to eat will be good enough for us. Mr Brentana,' he added, turning to Kate, 'is a true gourmet. We are safe in his hands.'

Kate had never eaten caviar. She watched while Ingleby spread his thickly on hot toast and followed suit. As, reluctantly, she watched the caviar bowl taken away, there came a soft voice at her elbow which said: 'With Mr Brentana's compliments, Miss Marlowe.' On a silver salver beside her rested three orchids of a curious metallic hue which almost matched the colour of her hair. Beside it was a cunningly contrived gold pin, designed to hold flowers flat without crushing them.

After the caviar came wafer-thin slices of smoked and spiced bear's tongue, imported from Siberia. On its heels came slices of pheasant breast *à la king*, followed by breathing space in the form of a water ice. Then thick stems of asparagus, dripping with melted butter and, finally, ice-cold peaches, steeped in champagne and swollen to twice their normal size.

'It isn't true, it just isn't true,' said Kate with a sigh. 'I shall wake up in a minute to find that it was only a dream. But what a lovely dream!'

'You will never know, Miss Marlowe,' said Ingleby with complete sincerity, 'how much I envy you this evening. You are doing things for the first time. I suspect that you ate caviar for the first time. Savour it, fix it in memory, because never again so long as you may live will it taste half as good.'

Briefly, taking vicarious pleasure in her pleasure, John Ingleby forgot his deep-laid plan to possess this radiant girl and to replenish his own youth from her boundless store. It would not last, but in this mood, no longer the slave of his desires, he had the grace to want to spare her.

A somewhat sun-burned, tarboused Turk from New Orleans served thick, sweet, Turkish coffee, and then it was time to gamble.

In return for a scribbled chit, Ingleby was given chips to the value of \$5,000. 'Help yourself to these, Miss Marlowe. If you have never gambled before,' he said, 'you may expect what we call fool's luck.'

'No, thank you all the same,' said Kate primly, 'I couldn't do that. But I have here' – she fumbled in her evening bag – 'sixty dollars of my own. Please let me buy the chips from you.'

Smilingly, Ingleby counted out the required number of chips. 'You are very wise, my dear,' he said paternally. 'Only a fool, or a rogue, gambles with borrowed money, unless he knows he can pay. It isn't worth all the worry. There are young fellows here tonight, maybe, who will lose a year's pay in advance, forgetting that people who lose to Brentana have to pay . . . one way or another.'

Kate enjoyed a little 'fool's luck' at the roulette table, but the game did not hold her. It was more amusing, and horrifying too, to watch Ingleby gambling in sums which to her were huge, apparently indifferent to winnings or losses.

The outstanding memory of the *Casa de Sevilla* would always be the richness and luxury within by contrast with the hideous poverty without.

As they drove back towards the International Settlement in the small hours of the morning, Kate felt impelled to revise her earlier judgment of John Ingleby. If he had behaved badly in Hongkong – and on that there could be no two opinions – he had gone a long way towards redeeming himself by his behaviour this evening. Kate was glad that she had accepted his invitation. He had been a delightful host and his conduct had been immaculate. The evening would have been perfect had it not been for gnawing doubts about Gordon Maitland. Why had he been so rude and unkind as to leave her waiting for him without explanation?

Before Kate knew the answer to this question, it would be too late for anything but regrets.

Rosalie Jenkins was still up when Kate returned to the hotel. She had tried to sleep, but anxiety to know how matters had progressed between Kate and John Ingleby had stood between her and sleep. 'Have a nice evening, dear?'

'Yes, thank you. It began badly, but ended well. For some reason or other that I don't know, Gordon kept me waiting. I waited half an hour and then I met Mr Ingleby downstairs. He invited me to dine with him and . . . well, I accepted. Gordon will be furious, I suppose, but he should have let me know what kept him.'

'Indeed, yes, my dear. As things turned out, it was lucky you met John Ingleby. Enjoy yourself?'

'Yes, Rosie, I had a wonderful evening and Mr Ingleby went out of his way to be very charming.'

Three minutes later, Rosalie Jenkins was snoring contentedly.

Seven

A note in Kate's handwriting on Kalee Hotel paper. 'Is there anything,' she asks with such emphasis that her pen tears the paper, 'that people won't do for money? Will I become like Rosie in time? Please God no!'

FROM A business standpoint, Gordon Maitland's trip up-river to Hankow had been an unqualified success. Not only was the business he was doing for Ingleby & Waters extremely lucrative, but the fact that he was acting for them which soon emerged, had put the seal of recognition on him. Chinese firms which hitherto would not have noticed his existence now asked him to act for them. Overnight, it seemed, the entire picture had changed. His feet were now firmly planted on the ladder. The only dark cloud on the horizon was that Kate, for reasons beyond his power to understand, had failed to reply to letters, or telegrams.

At the end of two weeks of blank silence, Maitland was in a frenzy of anxiety. His letters to Kate told her in some detail of what was happening in Hankow and that, all being well, the new business would enable them to be married much sooner than he had expected. It was unnatural, inhuman of her not to want to share his triumph. Perhaps it was vanity which prompted him to believe that Kate could not be so indifferent to anything which concerned them both so vitally, but if that were so, something was badly wrong. There was no other explanation.

After a sleepless night spent in wild imaginings, Gordon decided, regardless of the cost in terms of business, to take the first ship down-river to Shanghai. Unwilling to have anyone else inquire on his behalf, he would find out for himself what had happened. He had not even a theory as to what this might be until, an hour or two before sailing, he overheard a snatch of

conversation in the bar of the Hankow Club. 'I was out at The Wheel the other evening,' said a disembodied voice from the noon crush, 'when I saw the loveliest girl I think I've ever seen. I don't know who she was. All I know is that she was with that lucky bastard John Ingleby . . .'

A buzz of talk made the rest inaudible. Gordon would not have given the matter another thought if he had not heard the same voice mention ' . . . an enormous mop of vivid copper-coloured hair. Never seen anything like it in my life!'

Gordon had heard all he wanted to hear. It so knocked him off balance that he was compelled to go out into the fresh air to recover his composure. Even then, a minute or two elapsed before the full significance of it struck him, or he was enabled to connect his own unexpected mission on behalf of Ingleby & Waters with Kate's presence at The Wheel in the company of John Ingleby. Wasn't there a biblical story something like that? A soldier with a good-looking wife shunted off to a distant war while a king made free with her?

Brooding over the situation and putting the worst possible construction on what he had heard, he boarded the down-river ship like an avenging fury.

Gordon left the ship at Nanking and, crossing the river by ferry, caught the late afternoon train to Shanghai, where he arrived twelve hours or so ahead of the ship. At the Kalee Hotel all he could learn was that Kate was not there. Rosalie Jenkins was at home, but from the faint shrug of the shoulders which accompanied this piece of information he deduced that she was well on in drink.

Shanghai was a vast Chinese city but, so far as foreigners were concerned, little more than a big village. If Kate and Ingleby were together, unless they were tucked away in bed, Gordon knew that he could find them, for there were not a dozen possible places for them to be if they were out for the evening.

Gordon had been drinking steadily on the way down from Hankow. At all the likely spots where Kate and Ingleby might be and were not, he took a drink to keep the flames of his jealous rage alive, and by the time he set out for the Wheel, as the only

alternative to bed, he was in an ugly mood. He left The Wheel until last because to go there would necessitate changing into formal attire, Brentana being adamant on the subject and well able to enforce his rule.

It was midnight before Gordon, changed into a dinner jacket, with several more drinks under his belt, arrived at The Wheel in a murderous mood. Almost the first thing he saw on entering the gambling room was the lamplight reflected from Kate's hair. But what he did not know, and had no means of knowing, was that this was the second time only that Kate had accepted Ingleby's constant, pressing invitations to spend the evening with him. Kate, too, was angry. She had no least idea that Rosalie Jenkins had intercepted Gordon's letters and telegrams. It would never have occurred to her that the other could be so base.

Suddenly, Kate felt a heavy hand on her shoulder and was spun round to face Gordon Maitland, who glared at her angrily through bleary, bloodshot eyes. 'Well, well, well!' he exclaimed thickly. 'If it isn't little Miss Innocence herself!'

'Gordon,' she exclaimed in horror-stricken tones, 'you're drunk and making a terrible exhibition of yourself.'

'I'm making an exhibition of *myself*, am I? What do you suppose you're doing?'

'Go home and sleep it off,' said Ingleby, coming on the scene and taking in the situation. 'In case you don't know it, you're not being very funny.'

'I'll attend to you in a minute, Ingleby. Meanwhile, keep your nose out of things that don't concern you.'

Ingleby, who wanted to keep the incident within bounds and avoid further scandal, said nothing.

'It was a good show while it lasted,' said Gordon, turning viciously to Kate. 'Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. I didn't know that it was money you wanted. If I'd known that, don't you see, I wouldn't have wasted your time. Nobody can bid against Ingleby. How much is he paying you, Kate? How much, eh? Make him pay you plenty, my girl. He's got it . . . loaded with it . . . loaded with all the filthy money the Inglebys have made poisoning the Chinese with opium. It's dirty money and

there's lots of it. Girls who weren't a patch on you have hooked him for thousands. But what the hell! You're all the same when the light's out . . .

'But you wouldn't know about that, Ingleby old top,' he went on, whirling to face him. 'You're a lucky son-of-a-bitch, but even about that I wonder. All you've got really is money. At least, that's what your last girl told me. According to her, all you were good for was writing cheques. I laughed so much when she told me that, Ingleby old top, that I nearly fell out of bed . . .'

'This has gone far enough!' said Ingleby, white-faced with anger, pushing Gordon away from Kate.

'That's all I wanted, Ingleby,' said Gordon viciously. 'I've often wondered what you'd look like without any front teeth, and now I'm going to find out.' He was as good as his word, hitting Ingleby savagely in the mouth until hauled off by onlookers who believed the affair had gone far enough.

Kate, the innocent cause of this appalling scene, stood back aghast as Brentana, who acted as his own highly efficient 'bouncer', felled Gordon Maitland with a blow under the ear. 'Throw him into the street!' he said to four liveried Chinese servants.

'No!' said Kate determinedly. 'I will take him home.' Even in her bitter anger against him, she could not stand by to see him tossed to the human wolves outside.

'It is as the lady wishes,' said Brentana with a mirthless smile. 'Take him away and tell him that if he is wise he will never try to come here again.'

One of Ingleby's associates came forward to render first aid to his chief, who had lost several teeth and was bleeding profusely. Two Chinese, with Kate bringing up the rear, carried Maitland to a carriage, and the gambling was resumed as though nothing had happened. The last word was uttered by a voice from the crowd: 'And that,' a man said, 'was the most expensive day's work Maitland ever did. Ingleby & Waters were his best clients.'

Maitland did not recover full consciousness until just before the carriage arrived outside the bachelor chambers he occupied a few yards from The Bund. Even then he was too angry to speak and,

staggering slightly under the joint effects of drink and the blow under the car, entered the building without a backward look.

Kate realized that night for the first time in her short life that love was not only uncontrollable, but unconditional. Badly as Gordon had apparently behaved, first by disappearing without word and then by the disgraceful scene just enacted, her love for him still burned like a steady flame. Her pride would always prevent her from making overtures and, as she read Gordon's character, his pride too would stand between them.

While the horrible brawl was in progress at The Wheel, the causes of it had not seemed important. A jealous man, inflamed with drink, had made a disgraceful scene. But why had Gordon been jealous? The only logical reply to that was that he still loved her and was furious at finding her with another man. But, if that really were the answer, why had he let her worry herself sick for more than a fortnight without even letting her know where he was? It just did not make sense.

Kate knew herself to be inexperienced in the ways of the world, but that did not mean that she was a fool. Something was wrong, badly wrong, and she would not rest until she knew what it was. It was like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces did not fit.

Kate had heard the unknown voice announce to everyone in hearing that in effect, by his assault on John Ingleby, Gordon had lost a valuable client, but only now, as she drove back to the hotel, were the words taking on any significance. She was now more than ever convinced that something was wrong, for she distinctly remembered Gordon saying one evening that if he could only get one of the big firms as a client, his troubles were over. Well, if what the man at The Wheel had said were true, and it was not the sort of thing anyone would invent on the spur of the moment, Gordon had one of the big firms as client . . . Ingleby & Waters, the biggest of them all.

The blazing enmity which had flared between Gordon and John Ingleby when they confronted each other was not that of strangers. There had been, plain for anyone to see, a bitterness too deep to be explained away in terms of a quick flash of jealousy.

Kate did not pretend to understand it, but she understood enough to know that she was not in possession of all the facts. But she believed that she knew where to find the key to the situation and, snapping out of her reverie, told the coachman to drive her back to the hotel.

When Kate reached her room, the communicating door between hers and that of Rosalie Jenkins was standing ajar. A light was burning over the latter's bed. 'Have a nice time, dear?'

Kate did not reply.

'Come and tell poor old Rosie all about it.'

Still Kate did not reply, but ten minutes later, when she was washed and ready for bed, she went into the next room, standing with the light full on her face, gazing searchingly, wonderingly at the other.

'What's the matter, Kate?'

'That's what I want to know, Rosie . . . what I intend to know.'

'I don't understand,' quavered the other.

'Yes you do, Rosie. You're lying.'

Kate waited for the outburst of indignation, but it did not come. If there had been doubt in her mind before, there was none now. Fear and guilt were written plainly across the other's ravaged face.

'Well, Rosie, don't you think you'd better tell me . . . everything?'

There followed a silence which seemed unconscionably long. Rosalie Jenkins made several attempts to speak, but the words would not come. Kate waited, knowing that if she were patient the whole sorry story, whatever it was, would emerge.

'I did it for your sake, Kate,' faltered the old woman at last.

'Did what for my sake?'

'A penniless young man like Maitland was no good to you . . . wild and unreliable . . .'

'How sweet and unselfish of you, Rosie! What then?'

'If you try, Kate, anything can be made to sound bad. I was thinking of your happiness. Won't you understand, dear, that with Mr Ingleby your future was assured.'

'I see, you had it all arranged, Rosie. Is that it? Mr Ingleby was going to get a divorce and marry me and then, as the rich Mrs Ingleby, I was going to live happily ever afterwards. How much were *you* going to get out of it, Rosie? Were you going to be a bridesmaid? What fun for you!'

For months now Kate, with the weight of evidence against it, had been trying to hold on to her Sunday school concept of human nature. She wanted to go on believing in noble, unselfish motives, in kindness as a living force in the world, but she saw now that it was not going to be easy.

'I never said that Mr Ingleby was going to divorce his wife,' sobbed the other. 'I didn't mention the word divorce . . .'

'Then what *did* he want?'

'He wanted what every man who sees you wants. You know that, Kate, without putting it into so many words . . .'

'I see, Rosie,' said Kate silkily, 'Mr Ingleby wanted your help to turn me into a prostitute . . .'

'Don't make it sound worse than it is . . .'

'Is that possible, Rosie? How much were you going to get out of it?'

'Enough to retire on, to quit this soul-destroying round for ever,' said the other with a flash of spirit. 'No more cheap cabins on cheap ships. No more fighting for cut rates at frowsy hotels . . . no more tight-lacing in hot climates . . . no more of the hell I've lived in since Jenkins drank himself to death, the lazy loafer! By then I'd lost my looks. I had nothing to sell or, by God! I'd have sold it. That's what I would have got out of the deal I made with Mr Ingleby, and as for you, Kate, he was so smitten with you . . . still is . . . that you can have anything, anything you like.'

'Was, maybe, Rosie, but he isn't still. Gordon Maitland came to The Wheel this evening and the last I saw of your Mr Ingleby he was spitting teeth out on to that lovely oval Chinese carpet.'

'My God!' said the old woman, taking refuge in a paroxysm of weeping as she saw the silver lining of her cloud turn to lead.

Kate still stood there, her grey eyes altogether without warmth, gazing at the pitiful old ruin who had wrought so

much harm. 'There's more to be told, Rosie,' she said coldly, 'so you may as well tell me the rest . . . get it off your conscience . . . if you have one.'

'My God! Kate, but you're hard!'

'No, I'm not hard, or I never have been up till now. But I'm beginning to learn the rules, Rosie, and for the future, if I have to be hard to survive, then I'll be hard. Well, I'm waiting.'

Rosalie Jenkins did not speak. For reply, she took her handbag from the bedside table, opened an inner pocket, taking from it several telegrams and five letters in all, addressed to Kate in Gordon Maitland's handwriting. One of these, carefully torn into sixteen pieces, had been preserved in its envelope.

Kate continued to stand there until she had read them all and understood the whole story. 'You vile old woman!' was all she said.

Rosalie Jenkins, unable to bear the accusation she read in the cold eyes looking down at her, literally and metaphorically turned her face to the wall.

The boy who brought the tea in the morning gave Kate hers and, nodding towards the adjoining room, said: 'Missis no wantchee tea, missis dead.'

Eight

A bill from the Broadway Hotel, Shanghai, reminding Miss K. Marlowe that payment of \$122.30 is overdue.

KATE LOOKED across the desk uncomprehendingly at the vapid and elegant young man who, on a competitive market, might . . . just might have been worth thirty shillings a week, but whose powerful family connections would ensure that one day he could become an excellency. Not even the fact that he was a homosexual and, for the age, somewhat blatant about it, could impede his career. Rather the contrary if anything.

The man had one great virtue in Kate's eyes: he looked at her with eyes unclouded by lust. She might have been a piece of furniture.

'But surely,' Kate was saying, 'British consuls are supposed to help British subjects in trouble, or difficulties?'

'Are you presuming to define my duties to me?' the other said haughtily. He was bored by the whole conversation and anxious to get out to the Race Club. If this arrogant young woman with the sheen of ice in her eyes thought she belonged to the social class entitled to call upon His Britannic Majesty's consular representatives for assistance as a matter of right, the sooner she learned her error the better. It was time she was put in her place.

'The Consul-General's representative has already taken charge of the effects of this Mrs - er - Jenkins and her relations at home are being notified of her death . . .'

'No they are not. She had no relations. She told me so herself . . .'

'Really, Miss - er - Marlowe, I can't spare the time to argue with you. If you consider that you have any claim against the deceased's estate, kindly put it in writing . . . with evidence to support it.'

'I've already told you that there was no written agreement

between Mrs Jenkins and me. There was a clear verbal agreement under which I was paid a commission on every gown sold, and under that arrangement she owed me between nine hundred and a thousand Mexican dollars . . .'

'But what is to prevent you saying that she owed you ten times that amount . . . or twenty times?'

'Nothing, nothing except the fact that I am honest. I have never touched a penny belonging to anyone else in my life . . . and unless you want your eyes scratched out, don't you dare call me a liar and a thief . . . you stupid, pompous little man!'

That was Kate's exit line. Blazing with anger, she went out on to The Bund to cool off. It was beginning to dawn upon her how utterly alone in the world she was. It was waste of time, she was learning, to expect disinterested help from anyone. Men were prepared to discuss her problems in bed, women not at all. She never met European women, except as customers, and now there were no more customers.

With Rosalie Jenkins no longer paying the hotel bill, it became necessary for Kate to find cheaper accommodation. She found it in Hongkew, at a small place called the Broadway Hotel. Here stayed the minor lights of travelling theatrical companies, circus people, ships' officers on transfer and seedy commercial travellers. It was cheap and reasonably clean.

Without changing a detail of his improbable appearance, Konstantin Pavelitch, the proprietor of the Broadway Hotel, could have played the part of a Balkan bandit with conviction. He received Kate courteously, twirled the ends of his handle-bar moustaches, ushering her personally into a small but pleasant enough room. 'It is honour for Pavelitch to have in his poor house such a beautiful lady,' he said, bowing from the waist and leaving her.

'Pavelitch is quite a dear, really,' Kate's companion at the dinner table remarked that evening. 'My name's Kitty Toledo, by the way. My husband is the Great Toledo. We open Monday for a two weeks' season. You must see the show. I'll see that Joe gives you a couple of passes. He's drunk just now, but he'll sober up by Monday. I like that about Joe . . . never touches the stuff

when he's working. Yes, Pavelitch isn't such a bad guy really. Drinks hot blood for breakfast, so they say. Not on the game here, are you?' she concluded with another lightning-swift *non sequitur*.

'Game? I don't quite follow you,' said Kate with a bewildered air.

'Skip it!' said Kitty Toledo. 'I wish I had your looks,' she added wistfully. 'I wouldn't be staying in this dump, let me tell you. If that drunken bum Joe would only lay off the booze, we'd be playing in the big time. But take no notice of me, Kate. I feel like this sometimes. Things kinda tough, eh?'

'I need to get a job of some kind, that's all . . .'

'Some kind is right! You want to watch your step in this burg. What can you do?'

'Clothes is all I know,' replied Kate. 'Madame Rosalie . . . I worked for her until she died last week . . . said that I had the gift of wearing clothes.'

'Humph! If I know my Shanghai, the wearing of clothes won't get you far. You'll do better knowing when to take them off! Gee! I wish I could blush like that.'

Hall & Holtz, Weeks & Co., Lane Crawford's and lesser stores were sorry that they could not offer Kate a position of any kind.

Business firms pointed out what was the truth, that Kate had no qualifications whatever.

'If you think you can sell advertising - commission only, no salary - give it a trial,' said the business manager of an English-language newspaper.

'I'll try,' said Kate eagerly.

'Advertising is just waste of money,' said Kate's first prospect, the head of a small import-export firm, 'but how about dinner with me tonight?'

'I'm not as hungry as all that, thanks.'

'Well, let me know when you are.'

A few yards up the Nanking Road from The Bund, Kate saw a handsome young man arranging chocolates in the window of

a shop. 'If you will return here at six o'clock,' he said with a broad smile, 'I will be 'appy to discute zis matter wiz you, mademoiselle.'

Kate returned at 6 p.m. At 6.01 the Frenchman closed the shop, ushering Kate into the rear premises where he had his office. Locking the door, he put the key in his pocket. 'Now,' he said briskly, seizing Kate by the left breast and sitting her on his knee, 'w'at is zis foolish business you wish to discute wiz me? A so beautiful young lady is made for love, not business.'

In his Gallic enthusiasm, the young man was grinding his teeth.

An ebony ruler, round, smooth and heavy, the first thing which came to hand, smote the amorous Gaul on the left temple. Still grinding his teeth and smiling beatifically, he slid on to the floor.

Kate found the key, opened the office door and, before going into the street, smashed the plate-glass showcase with the ebony ruler.

A hundred times during a fruitless week spent trudging in and out of offices all over Shanghai's business quarter within three or four blocks of The Bund, Kate was tempted to pocket her pride and seek out Gordon Maitland. She saw him in the distance several times and once believed that he had seen her. That she did not go to him was due in large part to the coldly logical streak which governed her actions. She had read the letters and the telegrams from Hankow which Rosalie Jenkins had intercepted, as well as the one announcing his hasty departure, and she was conscious of having misjudged him. Hearing nothing, Kate had assumed the worst. Gordon, likewise, assuming that she had received his letters and knew where he was, was ready to put the worst construction on her presence at The Wheel with John Ingleby.

This, she argued, could only mean that neither of them had real trust in the other, and if that were so, it was as well that they had found it out so early. Marriage founded on anything but mutual trust was unthinkable. So, although she missed him sorely, Kate tried to rule Gordon out of her life.

It was after ten days of making fruitless calls, when Kate was about to throw in the sponge, that she again met John Ingleby. At the last office where she called, she began making her pathetic sales pitch to a fat man wearing braces and no jacket. By the door was a printed card which read:

Whatever it is
Put it in WRITING

Without even looking up, the man jerked his thumb at the notice and turned his back. 'Mannerless beast!' said Kate, storming out of the office.

'Who, may I ask,' came the well-modulated voice of John Ingleby, 'has had the temerity to be rude to Miss Marlowe?'

'A pig of a man in there,' Kate replied, not knowing whether she was glad or sorry at this encounter. 'If he didn't want to buy any advertising space, surely he could have said so politely.'

'Who on earth has allowed you to sell advertising like this, hawking it from door to door?' asked Ingleby, really shocked.

'Nobody has *allowed* me to do it,' replied Kate. 'It was the only kind of job I could find in Shanghai . . . but I'm just wasting my time. The men are all beasts! Those who don't try to maul me are as insulting as they can be. I hate them all, I hate this dreadful town. I feel'—she was not far from tears—'that Shanghai is trying to destroy me.'

'I was just going to make a call here,' said Ingleby, 'but it can wait. Come and have a quiet lunch somewhere and see if we can't improve your idea of Shanghai's manners. Failing all else, try to sell me some advertising.'

'I know you'd buy something, Mr Ingleby. That's . . . among other reasons why I kept away from you. It would really be giving me money and I don't want that. I must . . . I will stand on my own feet.'

'Surely,' said Ingleby, taking her gently by the elbow and steering her out of the building, 'you are being a little hard on me . . . and on yourself? What are friends for if they can't be

of some help in time of trouble? I am your friend, my dear. Let me prove it.'

A few months previously, Kate would have accepted the statement at face value. She had believed then that disinterested friendliness was a potent factor in human affairs. Not so potent, perhaps, as self-interest, but still a factor. Now, however, she was inclined to doubt everyone. These last weeks had been a period of bitter disillusionment. The worst blow had been to learn the depth of Rosalie Jenkins's perfidy. She had known the chill of true horror on realizing that, to make sure of a whisky-soaked old age, the raddled old woman had been willing to sell her to John Ingleby. That one woman could do this to another, was more than Kate could swallow.

Ingleby's part in all this had, of course, been an ignoble one. There was no denying that. But where he was concerned, the element of treachery was lacking. Old Rosie, on the other hand, had been the recipient of Kate's confidences. By virtue of the difference in their ages and circumstances, Kate had been entitled to believe that the older woman would keep faith. Ingleby was a man and men – it was beginning to dawn on Kate – were the slaves of their appetites. Ingleby had owed Kate no loyalty. He was evidently obsessed by her body and prepared to pay a high price for it. To his credit was that he was at least good-mannered and, after the experiences of the last few days, this meant a great deal to Kate.

John Ingleby was at that dangerous age when men look back reluctantly down the slope of the years they have climbed, and then forward to find that they have reached the crest. Before them lies the long, gradual descent into old age and oblivion. John Ingleby rebelled against the vista of the years ahead and, even though common sense told him it was not so, the belief persisted that in Kate's arms he could arrest the processes of time. This accidental meeting with her seemed to him like a reprieve. He had the wit to understand that Kate could not be bought, so he set out to charm her, smooth down the porcupine prickles of her suspicion.

'I am a businessman, Miss Marlowe,' said Ingleby as they

drank their after-lunch coffee in the main dining-room of the Astor House Hotel, 'and I want you to consider a business proposal. I propose that we go into partnership. I will bring to the partnership the money, relying on you for the understanding and talent. It is common knowledge in Shanghai that, thanks to you, Madame Rosalie made more money this trip than any previous one . . . although, as you well know, she hardly drew a sober breath the entire time. You are better off without her . . .'

'Except that I have never received my commission on sales,' interposed Kate, recounting the circumstances of her last visit to the British Consulate-General, 'and was practically called a thief for trying to get what was due to me.'

'Forget that, my dear. If you fall in with my suggestion, money will be the least of your troubles. I know where there are first-class premises vacant on the Nanking Road. I will cable my agents in Europe to buy the latest in gowns and frocks, lingerie and whatnots. I can find you a trustworthy Chinese accountant and "Kate Marlowe, Modes" will be in business. Surely that's a lot better than trying to sell advertising space to people who don't want it? What do you say?'

Kate paused for as long as courtesy permitted before replying.

'I won't deny that I'm terribly tempted to accept,' she said at length, 'but it wouldn't work. There are two sides to a partnership, Mr Ingleby. I would be taking everything and giving . . . nothing. Let's not deceive ourselves,' she went on. 'You know and I know that if I were fifty years old with a tufted wart on the chin, you wouldn't make me the offer. No, don't bother to deny it. So, don't you see, what you are suggesting isn't a business proposal. You have been kind. You make it sound so reasonable, but the truth is that I would feel under a great obligation because' - she blushed furiously as she said this - 'I'm not willing to give you the only thing you want from me. There, it's out!'

John Ingleby had the grace to look and feel uncomfortable. In his not inconsiderable experience, women were less concerned with the true nature of a bargain than with the way it could be made to look. If the price were high enough, they did not mind

being turned into whores, always provided, of course, that a save-face formula could be evolved to make it appear like something else. But here, cold determination in her eyes and her chin tilted pugnaciously, was a girl who insisted upon calling things by their right name. 'Miss Marlowe,' he said in a dead voice, 'you are perfectly right and I apologize. I would not have been satisfied with a business relationship. The dress shop was no more than a pretext. But I would hate you to get up from this table and believe for the rest of your life that I was incapable of any decent motive . . .'

Pulling out a cheque book he drew a cheque for \$5,000 in favour of Miss Kate Marlowe. 'Take this, I beg you,' he said earnestly. 'It is a love gift. There are no strings attached to it. I want nothing in exchange except to know that you have escaped from Shanghai before, as it inevitably will, it soils you beyond redemption.'

Without giving Kate a chance of speaking, Ingleby left the dining-room.

The extreme probability, and Ingleby must have known it, was that Kate would, as advised, take the money and leave Shanghai. It is also probable, therefore, that at the time he made the offer he meant it to be accepted at face value. Worse men than John Ingleby ever was have moments when they forget to be bad. Indeed, considering the habits inculcated in him in youth, with the added temptation of virtually unlimited money, it is surprising – and this was the view of his contemporaries – that he did as little harm in manhood as he seems to have done.

With Ingleby's cheque in her handbag and a mood of great indecision upon her, Kate returned timidly to the Broadway Hotel, dreading the encounter with Konstantin Pavelitch, who spent his waking hours behind the desk rolling himself Turkish cigarettes. This ferocious-looking man had never shown Kate anything but extreme courtesy, even if of a rather greasy kind, and her reluctance to meet him was founded upon the gnawing consciousness that she owed him for almost five weeks' board and lodging and was as far as ever from being able to pay him.

'Mr Pavelitch,' said Kate unhappily as she passed through

the lobby, 'I'm afraid my bill is getting rather large. It isn't easy to get a job in Shanghai and I . . . well, I want you to know I haven't forgotten it, that's all,' she finished lamely.

'Miss Marlowe!' exclaimed Pavelitch, holding up his hands in horror. 'That you should say such a thing to me, I am ashamed! Such a small thing! What does it matter! It is for me a pride that such a beautiful and distinguished lady should stay in my poor hotel. When the peoples see you walk in and out of my hotel, they say: "That lucky fellow, Konstantin Pavelitch. His hotel mus' be first-class number one, better than Astor House, that such a lady should stay there."'

'You are kind, Mr Pavelitch, very kind,' said Kate, restraining her tears with difficulty, genuinely touched by this uncommercial attitude. 'I can only say thank you.'

Little that had happened lately had given Kate cause for cheerfulness, but this talk with the hotelier, which she had been dreading for some time, gave her new heart.

Konstantin Pavelitch heaved with inner laughter as he watched Kate go up the stairs to her room. It was the laughter of pure mirth. The most profitable guest he had had in his hotel for years had thanked him and apologized because of an outstanding bill. Only five weeks! He asked nothing better than that it should go on for ever.

This Pavelitch loved money. He worshipped it with all the blind adoration which other men offer in vaulted cathedrals and at roadside shrines. It was to him the one reality in the shifting sands of life. There were two reasons why he had never committed murder for money, one being that no opportunity of doing so with profit and impunity had so far presented itself. The other was Pavelitch's certainty that only fools obtain by violence what can be obtained by stealth. It was strange, for he came from a violent land and had the look of one with violence in his genes.

First there was the rich and powerful Mr John Ingleby.

'Pavelitch,' Ingleby had said weeks previously, 'there is a young

lady staying in your hotel. Her name is Miss Marlowe. In no circumstances whatsoever is she to be pressed for payment of her hotel bill. If she does not pay it, send a copy to me and it will be paid. But, and this is most important, Miss Marlowe must be allowed to believe that her account remains unpaid. If at any time, night or day, you have reason to believe that she is leaving, you are to let her go but have her followed. Then report to me. Do you understand?

‘Remember, Pavelitch, no monkey tricks with me, or I’ll have you run out of Shanghai within twenty-four hours!’

‘No monkey tricks, Mr Ingleby!’

A few days after this, Gordon Maitland, who was passing the Broadway Hotel in his broker’s gharry, saw Kate in the lobby. The subsequent interview between Gordon Maitland and Konstantin Pavelitch had followed similar lines, except that the former, who lacked Ingleby’s power and influence, promised to beat the hotelier to pulp if Kate were treated with anything but respect.

‘It shall be as you say, Mr Maitland,’ said Pavelitch. ‘The lady shall have all respect while in my hotel.’

All this tender concern for the lovely English girl gave Pavelitch food for thought.

Nine

The Memory Box contained many photographs, most of them meaningless except to Kate. But the most striking of them was of a grotesque woman ensconced in a huge wing chair which looks like a throne. She has five distinct chins, boldly staring eyes and the tilted nose of an Irish pugilist. The face is only just redeemed from savagery by a brutal, careless good humour. The photograph is inscribed: 'For Kate from her sincere friend Belle Darling.' On the back Kate has written wryly: 'I wonder what she does to her sincere enemies.'

IN HONGKONG, when men spoke of going 'up the line' for an evening's amusement, they referred to the respectable-seeming Lyndhurst Terrace, where Gracie and her kind offered the world's oldest hospitality to those with the price. In Shanghai, doubtless as a concession to the mudflats on which the city was built, the *cognoscenti* always spoke of going 'down the line'.

The Line in Shanghai was a tiny L-shaped district formed by the meeting at right angles of Kiangse Road and the famous Soochow Creek, tributary of the Grand Canal and water highway to Central China. Here, faintly Georgian in style, with all the outward respectability of terraces in Bath or Tunbridge Wells, were up to a dozen discreet houses. Cosmopolitan as Shanghai itself, lewd and lusty as Rome in her palmiest days, shrugging off the frowns of the minority and the plaudits of the many with the same careless indifference, were brothels whose luxury was a byword the world over.

Housed here were voluptuous women from almost every land on earth, burning up the precious years of youth with little thought for a future which most of them were too stupid to envisage. There were ash-blondes from the Baltic; heavy-

hipped, cow-like women from Germany and Austria; slumbrous, cruel women from the Slavic lands; vivacious Frenchwomen, who had studied for harlotry as others study for medicine or the law, and who practised their profession with a gay abandon which forbade pity; dark-haired, beaten women from Poland, rounded up by white-slave dealers, herded aboard ship like cattle, too cowed to know, or care, whether their destination were Shanghai or Buenos Aires; 'high yallers' from the Mississippi country, making more money in a night than they had ever seen in their lives, and loving every minute of it; flamboyant, flinty-eyed, full-breasted women from San Francisco's Barbary Coast whose tears, if they had not forgotten how to shed them, would have corroded gun-metal; and there were even ugly, deformed women, for those who liked their sad pleasures brought to them in twisted, tortured vessels.

The most notorious house of this notorious quarter was that run by a mountainous woman known as Belle Darling, who had fled New York many years previously when not even the power of Tammany Hall could have saved her from prosecution had she stayed. A twelve-year-old girl had been brutally and unspeakably done to death in her establishment.

It was the polished brass knocker of Belle Darling's house which, in the quiet of a Sunday afternoon, Konstantin Pavelitch lifted timidly. The door was opened instantly by a servant constantly on duty, to save Shanghailanders the embarrassment of being seen waiting on the step of a brothel.

Belle Darling received Pavelitch in her private living quarters, surveying him shrewdly through beady little eyes almost submerged in pouched flesh. 'Well, what do you want?' she asked, true to her belief that men were easier to deal with when knocked off balance.

'I t'ink I have something that will interes' you, Belle. She is at my place and there is a little difficulty about her bill. Six . . . nearly seven weeks she owes. You remember Madame Rosalie, don't you?'

'Sure I remember the old soak. What of it?'

'Then you will remember the little English girl who modelled

her gowns . . . with hair like copper and gold. She is beautiful like a fairy.'

'Sure I remember her! Who wouldn't? She's the gal the boys call Singapore Kate. What's she doin' in a dump like yours?'

'Like I said, Belle, she has no money.'

'Can't think of a better reason. Bring her along here an' she'll make money so fast she'll think it's a bank. Singapore Kate! Why in hell didn't you say so at first? She can have the best room in the house . . . an' there's a nice slice of pie in it for you, Pavelitch. If you let one of the other houses snatch her, I'll . . .'

'You know I wouldn't do that, Belle,' said Pavelitch unhappily, flinching under the ferocity of the other's glare.

'Not twice you wouldn't.'

'Softly, Belle, softly. It will not be easy like that. The little girl is not yet ready for you. She is timid like a deer. Also, there is the matter of the bill. It is nothing to you, Belle, but it is much to me. You will pay that?'

'Sure, I'll pay it. Let me come along and talk to her.'

'Not yet, Belle, not yet. She is too shy.'

'No monkey business, Pavelitch, or by God! I'll . . .'

That was twice he had been warned against monkey business. Pavelitch looked hurt. 'How much for me, Belle, if the little girl shall come to your house? How much?'

'She's English, you say? Then the Limey consul would have her out of here in five minutes.'

'She will not be English, Belle, not after I find her a good German husband. He owes me for three weeks already. Leave it to me. How much, Belle?'

'A thousand bucks the day she comes here. A thousand more if she stays a month an' another thousand if she stays three. Okay?'

'Okay, Belle!'

As Pavelitch returned to his hotel, he fell into step beside Kate, who had been for a long walk. Turning upon her his most beatific smile, he said: 'Tomorrow, Miss Marlowe, the bes' room in the hotel will be empty. It is my shame that I could not give

it to you before. But in the morning it will be clean and ready for you. It is larger and there are two windows. You must not tell peoples, but I will charge you the same as for your old room.'

'You are too kind, Mr Pavelitch.'

'Hush! It is nothing,' he said with becoming modesty.

Ten

The business card of Mr S. Higashikawa, Shanghai manager of the Yokohama Trading Bank. The 'Mr' was deleted in ink and 'Mrs' substituted. On the back of the card Kate had written: 'I wonder just how far I am responsible for what happened . . . how far any human being is responsible for any other. But the fact is that she came to me needing help and I gave her none. Not even comfort.'
—From the Memory Box.

'ANYTHING can happen in Shanghai . . . anything at all!' Rosalie Jenkins had once said to Kate who, now in her eighth week at the Broadway Hotel, was approaching desperation.

Sitting in the lounge one day, trying to concentrate on a newspaper, Kate looked up to see the Number One Boy from the dining-room smiling at her and holding out a plate on which was a handsomely engraved card. 'What does she want?'

'My no savvee,' replied the boy with an expressive shrug.

'All right, send her in.'

After a brief delay, there entered the lounge the daintiest Japanese woman Kate had ever seen. She was dressed in formal Japanese style, the graceful garments being made from richly brocaded silks. She bowed ceremoniously with a hissing intake of breath. She was young, probably under thirty, with sad, almost tragic eyes. Kate warmed to her at once.

'What can I do for you, Mrs Higashikawa?' she asked, reading from the card.

'You are beautiful, Miss Marlowe, more beautiful than I was told,' said the other in correct but stilted English. 'I have never seen hair of such a colour. Is it natural?'

'Yes, it is the natural colour,' replied Kate, realizing that there was no rudeness in the question. 'What can I do for you?'

'My husband,' began the Japanese woman, 'lived five years in London.'

'Ah! It was in London, I suppose, that you learned to speak such good English,' said Kate, trying to keep the conversation alive.

'No, I have never visited London. I learned English from a governess who taught the children. She was English, like you. Miss Carson was her name . . .'

Kate waited.

' . . . but she was not beautiful . . . like you. But you ask why I am come here. I will tell you. It is my husband who wishes me to speak with you . . .'

'I do not understand.'

'My husband is a rich man, Miss Marlowe . . .'

'But what has that to do with me?'

'Only this, Miss Marlowe, that if you will come back to Japan with us when we go next month, he will pay you much money. He thinks you are the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. You would live in the big house, of course, and I would live in the small house. You would not see me . . . that is, unless you wished to see me.'

'And he sent you . . . his wife . . . to suggest this! What kind of man is he?'

'We . . . he thought it would be better if I came to see you, Miss Marlowe, but if you prefer, he will come to see you. At what time do you wish to receive him?'

'I don't wish to receive him at any time,' said Kate with rising ire. 'I want nothing to do with him. But how can you, his wife, have so little pride? Don't you care, Mrs Higashikawa?'

'I am a Japanese woman, Miss Marlowe. Pride . . . that is just a word. If I care, or if I do not care, it is all the same. You will not come to Japan with us?'

'No, I will not, and you may tell your husband from me . . .'

'I shall tell my husband nothing, Miss Marlowe. I have failed and I shall not see him again. If you had wished to come, it would have been different, but I could not return to him without you. . . .'

'I just don't understand,' said Kate bleakly.

'I am happy for you that you do not understand, Miss Marlowe. But I am sad, very sad, that you will not come, for I like you and I think we would have been friends. Good-bye, Miss Marlowe, good-bye!'

The little Japanese woman rose with great dignity, bowed and, with a hissing intake of breath, was gone.

It was not until two days later that Kate understood the full implications of the visit. The *North China Daily News* carried an item to the effect that the body of a Japanese woman washed ashore in the Whangpoo River ten miles below Shanghai had been identified as Mrs Higashikawa, wife of the manager of the Yokohama Trading Bank. She had failed in her mission. Suicide had been her only course.

Eleven

An undated diary entry in Kate's handwriting says: 'Mary believed that "Calais" would be found written on her heart. I would not be surprised if "Mary Simonides" were written on mine.'

THE SHORT Shanghai winter was over. Already, there was the smell of spring in the air. Out by Loonghwa Pagoda the peach trees were showing signs of burgeoning life. Even the beggars who lined the approaches to the Pagoda seemed pleased that spring had come, arranging their sores jauntily in the bright sunshine, whether for the healing properties of the sun's rays, or the better to excite the pity of the charitable, Kate did not know.

She had come out here to the Chinese city to escape from her own kind, whom she was beginning to loathe, the men for their animal glares, and the women, who had already classed her as what their husbands wanted to make of her. The women were even more merciless than the men, for they resented her unspoiled beauty. It was so long since these poor faded creatures, with their easily-punctured upper-class pretensions, had heard men breathing hot, shameless avowals, that they were making a virtue of necessity.

Out here at Loonghwa, amid the happily chattering alien throng, Kate, who did not understand a word of their language, felt more at ease than among her own kind. Here a smile was a symbol of friendliness, no more. Here, when a man jostled her as he passed, it was an accident and the grunted apology sincere. The men, the women and the children stared, of course, but there was neither lust nor envy in their eyes, only the wonderment of a sallow people with lank black hair for the burnished glory of Kate's and the creamy magnificence of her skin. With the wonderment was friendliness too, for in no other land on earth is there a more spontaneous appreciation of beauty for its

own sake than China, especially beauty as portrayed by colour.

Elderly Chinese gentlemen, clad in the subdued blue, green, black and grey silk gowns of their kind, walked abroad carrying their caged singing birds, sharing the golden spring afternoon with their pets as they exchanged learned nonsense and pious platitudes with their cronies.

In other circumstances Kate would have been enthralled, but now, bowed down by the weight of her cares, she had the feeling that she would never smile again.

Although Kate had no smallest inkling that she was the object of so much interest, she had, nevertheless, some of a wild creature's awareness of danger.

The easiest way out of all her difficulties, of course, would have been to forget pride, pay John Ingleby's cheque into the bank and leave China for good. The chances were that she would never cross his path again. If he were one-tenth as wealthy as rumour had it, he would not feel the loss of the money. The temptation to do this was wellnigh irresistible, but in resisting, Kate – however priggish it may sound sixty years later – was being true to the not altogether bad standards of Victorian England. In brief, no nicely brought up young woman accepted money from a man who was not her husband, or a close relative.

Where Gordon Maitland was concerned, her attitude was complicated by the fact that she was in love with him, despite his willingness to believe the worst of her. Even now, she winced when she remembered the ghastly scene at The Wheel. She had no sense of guilt whatever because of her harmless association with John Ingleby, and if she were ever to have anything more to do with Gordon, it was for him to make the overtures. Such was her unbending code. Nor would she budge an inch from it.

As Kate, tired from hours of walking, entered the lobby of the Broadway Hotel, Pavelitch emerged from his cubby-hole. 'Have you any engagement after your dinner, Miss Marlowe?' he asked. 'None? Good, I am glad. About nine o'clock a lady will call here. It is possible – we cannot be sure – that she will have something to interes' you. You will see her?'

'Of course, Mr Pavelitch! I am very grateful to you. I am anxious. I have been worrying all day about . . . everything. My bill this morning frightened me . . . and I see no way to pay it.'

'It is a little large, Miss Marlowe,' said Pavelitch sorrowfully. 'I am not a rich man, you will understand . . . but let us not speak of such matters. Let us hope that the lady who comes this evening brings good news.'

'I hope you enjoyed the beautiful sunshine this afternoon, Miss Marlowe. The spring is the best time of the year. It is in the spring that I remember the flowers in my own country . . . always so beautiful.'

Konstantin Pavelitch was pleased with himself and with the world. There had been just the right degree of urgency in his mention of the hotel bill, enough to warn this English girl that the reckoning was near, and to make her pliable.

'You're a smooth-talking son-of-a-bitch, Pavelitch!' said Belle Darling, who had heard the entire conversation from the privacy of the inner office. 'Gotta hand it to you!' she added admiringly.

Belle Darling was a notable exponent of the verbal bludgeon, who knew her own limitations, but she recognized in Pavelitch an artist with the rapier. She was a shrewd judge of character. Hers was a profession which demanded quick and accurate appraisals. She knew instinctively that Kate was a fastidious girl who, despite lack of sophistication, was neither fool nor weakling. She knew, too, that her own gross, flamboyant personality and blistering language could never win Kate's confidence, at any rate not until she had been through such hell that even Belle Darling would look like a guardian angel.

Belle had had many lovely girls through her hands, but never one with Kate's unspoiled beauty, rare colouring, superb carriage and grace, who bore the indelible marks of good breeding and – it was not one of Belle's words – wholesomeness.

These things, especially the last, were commodities for which the connoisseurs of lechery were prepared to pay almost anything. They were prepared to delude themselves beyond all reason, for only a fool could believe that the kind of tender youth

and sweet innocence to be found in a bawdy house would be anything but base counterfeit. But Belle Darling was an authority on the follies of men, as well as the weaknesses of women, acquiring over the years a ruthless, frightening accuracy in exploiting either.

When Belle Darling went away, as she sometimes did, on recruiting trips, she left her establishment under the watchful eye of a woman named Mary Simonides, a Cockney ex-dancer, stranded in Shanghai some years previously and married to Toni Simonides, Greek café proprietor and procurer, who, admittedly a rascal, was a paragon of virtue compared with his wife. Mary Simonides was a vicious, depraved young woman, still good-looking and—here was her chief utility to Belle Darling—having the appearance of everything she was not. On her best behaviour she could have passed for one of those pleasant, ineffective young women who, in the vague phrase, ‘do good works’ under the clucking supervision of emasculate curates.

Belle Darling put great trust in Toni and Mary Simonides because she knew enough about them individually and collectively to have them put behind bars for a long term. In Belle’s shrewd estimation, Mary Simonides would be able, better than anyone, to capture and subdue the girl on whom, knowing nothing about her, Shanghai had already pinned the label ‘Singapore Kate’.

Slowly, gently, imperceptibly, the jaws of the trap were beginning to close.

In the first few minutes of meeting Mary Simonides, Kate was left with the impression of a friendly, kindly young woman, a trifle short on aspirates and grammar, but genuinely ready to be helpful to a fellow countrywoman in distress.

‘Toni and me—Toni’s my husband—we got the idea from Pavelitch, who isn’t such a bad bloke in spite o’ that moustache, that you was down on your luck. Well, I’m English, too, except that bein’ married to a Greek makes me Greek, an’ it’s a hard world if you can’t do something for your own. It’s a hard world

anyway, I dessay, but two heads are better than one, as my old mother used to say, so let's see if we can't find a way out of your troubles, eh?'

'I don't know how to thank you for being so kind,' said Kate, genuinely touched. 'Even if you can't do anything, perhaps it will do me good to talk to someone. I've bottled up all my troubles until they've made me feel stupid. Mr Pavelitch has been very kind and, although he hasn't pressed me, I know it can't go on much longer. I just don't know what will happen . . . then.'

'Turn off the waterworks, dearie!' said Mary, her voice vibrant with sympathy. 'We'll find a way out of this somehow, never you fear. Now you needn't tell him I told you, but I 'appen to know that Pavelitch is in a bit of trouble himself. Bin gamblin', I dessay. So you see, even if you can't pay 'im now, it'd help 'im if your room was free, wouldn't it?'

'I suppose it would,' Kate agreed, 'but, however selfish this may sound, what happens to me then?'

'I'm comin' to that, dearie. Now Toni and me, we run a nice café down on the North Szechuan Road, 'bout a mile from 'ere. It's not a posh place like you're used to, understand, but we're simple people and it gives us a livin'. We live on top o' the business, nice and handy, because the hours are long . . . two, three in the mornin' sometimes. Now if you'd like it, there's a spare room there. You can 'ave it an' welcome. One more mouth to feed won't make no difference.

'When things go right for you – an' they will, you know, becos as my old mother used to say, every cloud 'as a silver lining – then you can think o' payin' us. Until then, forget it. I know I shall be glad of your company, I'm that lonely sometimes. Maybe when we're busy you won't mind givin' us a hand, eh? Many hands make light work, eh?'

'Of course, dearie, I don't 'ave to tell you we're not your class of people. My old man was a bricklayer an' I'm proud of it. If I was a lady like you, I'd be proud of that, too, but I'm not an' I have to make the best of meself as I am. So, if you can put up with our simple ways, dearie, you'll be as welcome as the flowers

in May. Now don't you fret, becos things are goin' to be all right now.'

Kate could not speak for emotion. A great hard lump had come into her throat and tears of unspeakable relief rolled down her cheeks.

It was arranged that Mary would call for Kate in the morning. Pavelitch, told of the arrangement, generously waived the hotel-keeper's right to keep Kate's baggage until the bill was paid. 'We shall miss such a beautiful young lady,' he said gallantly, 'and when you have money, I am sure you will pay me. Good-night, Miss Marlowe.'

Mary Simonides looked back from the door to see that Kate was fighting to hold back the tears. 'Silly little bitch!' she muttered, hailing a rickshaw.

Konstantin Pavelitch was writing a letter or, to be more precise, two identical letters, one to John Ingleby and the other to Gordon Maitland. He had an uncomfortable feeling where these two were concerned that if they ever learned the truth about his double-treble-dealing, each would implement his threat.

At all costs, it must not appear that, whatever might happen to the English girl, he, Konstantin Pavelitch, was in any way to blame. The letters read:

The lady has left my hotel.

K. Pavelitch.

This was not strictly true, for even as he appended his laborious signature, the lady was waiting in the lobby to say good-bye and to thank him once again for his many kindnesses.

Like a large part of humanity, Pavelitch had a split personality, and with one part of his curious nature he was genuinely sorry to see the last of the lovely girl who for months had been eating out her heart in his shabby hotel. The brightest part of the day for him had always been the little exchanges of pleasantry with her as she entered and left the hotel on her fruitless errands.

There was the illusion when she passed that a ray of sunshine had crossed his desk, gilding the fly-specked papers and bringing light into a life which saw little light. He would miss her. He was glad, too, that until the very end he had been able to maintain the attitude of respectful courtesy.

That he was largely instrumental in selling this lovely girl to what he knew could only be a life of shame, had nothing to do with these other delicate feelings. That was business and only a fool allowed private feelings to stand in the way of business advantage.

'You will pay me when you can, Miss Marlowe,' Pavelitch said sadly as Kate was about to leave her Broadway Hotel in the rickety conveyance which Mary Simonides had sent for her. 'You mus' not worry about such a small thing, and if you cannot pay, it is no matter. Konstantin Pavelitch will understand and he will always be proud that the beautiful English lady once stayed in his poor house.'

Having been paid three times over, he felt he could afford this generous gesture.

Mary Simonides did not come to fetch Kate. If they were never seen together at the hotel, she could not be linked with Kate's departure. Kate would have left the hotel alone for an unknown destination.

Twelve

Dog-eared and blurred from much handling, a crude half-tone picture postcard depicting The Acropolis Café, Shanghai. Across it Kate had written: 'Here I learned to hate.'

THERE ARE some buildings which, although comparatively new, take on an air of dilapidated old age as soon as the builders have turned their backs. Plaster cracks, woodwork warps, paint peels and all the other outward signs of decay seem to spread like a contagious rash. Such a building was that which housed The Acropolis Café, Toni Simonides, Prop.

The oldest building in that part of North Szechuan Road was less than ten years of age. Nor was The Acropolis the oldest. Surveying its frowsy façade for the first time, Kate felt her heart sink, and this was before she came within earshot of the tuneless piano tinkling within, or smelled the combined odours of garlic and many times used frying fat, or the sweaty, unwashed bodies of the all-nations scum who were its patrons. It was as though, like a bloodstain which became indelible, the ugly ways within proclaimed themselves outside for all the world to see.

A waft of stale air came out to meet Kate as, timidly, she opened the door. She shuddered, bracing herself to enter. It was all the same now, whether she liked it or not. She had burned her boats. There was no return now to the shabby, but by contrast palatial, Broadway Hotel.

'Here you are at last,' said Mary Simonides, coming through the murk to meet her. 'Let's go upstairs an' have a nice hot cuppa tea. As my old mother used to say, there's nothin' like a nice 'ot cuppa tea.'

A slovenly Chinese boy went ahead with Kate's baggage and Mary Simonides ushered Kate up a narrow flight of wooden stairs to the private living quarters which, shabby and

uninspiring as they were, were a vast improvement on the café below.

'It ain't as bad as it looks, dearie,' said Mary, sensing Kate's fastidious shrinking from her surroundings and feeling the need to defend them. 'You'll get used to it, same like I did. We 'ave some very cheery evenin's down there, specially when there's Greek ships in the river. All the Greek boys know Toni. Italians, too, but they don't mix. You can 'ave 'em both, if you ask me. I expect you feel the same way. But don't let Toni 'ear you say that. Last time I told 'im w'at I thought about Greeks, all I 'ad for my pains was a cut lip. Toni 'as a nasty temper when 'e's riled.'

Kate bristled at the thought of watching her utterances lest she offend an ugly-tempered Greek café proprietor. But then she remembered that, good or bad temper, she was beholden to him.

'Mind you,' Mary rattled on, 'Toni's a great one for running the place respectable. He's a quiet, well-be'aved man himself and likes to see others the same. Toni likes a cuppa tea, so 'e'll soon be up. You'll like Toni, you will.'

A few minutes later Kate found that Mary's description of her husband as a quiet, well-behaved man fitted him like a glove. He had shiny black hair, a complexion as sallow as most Chinese and a small black moustache worn flat to the upper lip. There was nothing more to be said about Toni's face, remarkable only for its utter lack of expression. If he had emotions, they were not to be read upon his face. 'Pleased to meetcha. Make yourself at home,' he said to Kate as he opened the newspaper. Thereafter, he ignored both women.

'Chatty feller, isn't he?' said Mary a little later when Toni had gone downstairs.

Kate sensed, and rightly, although she could not explain how, that Mary Simonides lived in abject terror of her husband. It was possible, sitting with them, to feel the intensity of their unspoken thoughts. Already beginning to live by new and frightening standards, Kate took comfort in the thought that in the violent antagonism between these two there was an element of

safety for herself. Toni, as Kate read him, would do evil because it was expedient, while Mary would do evil both because it was expedient and because it pleased her. Toni was neuter, while Mary was bad right down to the core. Danger, when it came, would be from Mary.

These reflections came, not from the surface of the mind, but from deep down, unbidden, where the thought processes are largely instinctive. It was strange because, Kate was forced to acknowledge, from Mary Simonides she had had nothing but casual kindness.

Kate remained upstairs for three days. Time passed more slowly than she ever remembered. There was nothing to do. To have set to work to give the living quarters a much-needed cleaning would have been an oblique criticism of her hosts, who would have been quick to resent it. Sooner or later, she knew, she would have to go downstairs to help with the running of the café. But she dreaded it. The smells and the occasional bursts of horrifying language scared her.

Even to go for a walk was not practicable, for the neighbourhood was rough. The Chinese went about their business with an indifference which, even if chilling at times, had in it the elements of courtesy. It was the foreigners, the Europeans, the people of her own blood, who were to be feared. Most were foul-mouthed, violent and, more often than not, far gone in drink. Down there, where the International Settlement ran with Chinese territory and the lines of jurisdiction were vague, was a semi-outlaw colony of foreigners, men without papers of any kind, deserters from ships and men on the run for a score of reasons. Even the police went there in threes and fours, heavily armed, walking for choice in the middle of the roadway.

'You know, dearie,' said Mary Simonides at length, giving utterance to the thoughts which hung implicit between them, 'maybe it would look better . . . better to Toni, if you know what I mean . . . if you was to come down and give us a hand this evening. Like that, don't you see, you'd become one of the family, so to speak. Toni's a funny chap, as I dessay you've seen

for yourself. Most of the time, wouldn't hurt a fly, but when he thinks people are bein' standoffish, so to speak, it rouses the devil in him, an' I'm sure you wouldn't like to give 'im the idea you was like that, Kate, would you?'

'All right, Mary, I'll come down,' said Kate in a dead voice, 'but I don't mind admitting that I'm scared to death. What do I have to do?'

'Look at me! I've 'ad three years of it,' said Mary. 'Hasn't hurt me, has it? All you got to do is be nice to the customers, that's all. See that the drinks keep comin'. Can't 'ave customers sittin' down there all evenin' with empty glasses in front of 'em, can we? That wouldn't pay the rent.'

'Can you lend me an apron, Mary?' asked Kate. 'I've nothing suitable to wear.'

'Apron?' said Mary, laughing loudly. 'An apron isn't goin' to be much good to you. We got Chinese boys to swab the tables and do the washin' up. Put on one of your nice evenin' gowns an' give us all a treat. Be ready by ten, dearie' – this had the edge of an order – 'no later than ten or, maybe, Toni wouldn't like it, an' we don't want Toni to get any wrong ideas, do we?'

'She's comin' downstairs tonight,' Mary Simonides reported to Belle Darling. 'By the time some of the boys have handled her, she'll be ready for anything. Your place'll look like a home-from-home to her, the stuck-up, silly bitch. It'll do her a power of good if you ask me.'

'But nobody did ask you, Mary,' said Belle Darling. 'Don't let those baboons knock her about . . . too much. Enough y'understand to make her reasonable, but no more. Handled right, that gal is worth real dough and plenty of it, so I don't want her marked up, see?'

After one drink of Toni's whisky, strong men gasped. After two, they began to suffer from blurred vision. After three, those

who remained vertical wanted to fight. Some hours earlier in the day, one Aldo Ferrari, coal-trimmer in an Italian tramp sailing out of Genoa, greatly daring, had swallowed four. Since then, he had lain like a log on the floor, head resting upon a massive stone cuspidor.

Shortly before ten o'clock in the evening, Aldo Ferrari recovered consciousness of a kind. His eyes would not focus properly and a devil's orchestra was beating in his ears. Dizzily, he struggled to his feet, fumbled in his pockets for a cigarette butt, lit it and, base ingratitude, was at once sick into the cuspidor he had been using as a pillow. He felt better, but still not very well. He had a good constitution and with care he would recover. 'Give me a drink, Toni,' he asked piteously.

'The money first,' was the cold reply.

'Buy me a drink,' he said to a bedizened girl who sat on a bar stool, adjusting her gaudy and none-too-clean evening gown so that it concealed the scars of a skin disease on her left breast. 'My belly is on fire. Today, when I had money, I bought drink for you.'

For reply, the girl turned away from the mirror to spit in Aldo's face.

The other patrons, mostly hailing from Aegean, Adriatic and Black Sea ports, laughed heartily. Their turn would come.

While Aldo was fumbling in his pockets for a second time, just to make sure that he had not overlooked a stray coin, his fingers encountered a large cockroach which, during the time he lay on the floor, must have crawled into his clothes for the warmth.

Aldo was a merry fellow who dearly loved a joke. Delicately, with the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, he pulled at the elastic bottom of the left leg of the girl's bloomers. She, believing that this tribute came from the chief engineer of a Russian freighter en route from Vladivostok to Odessa, who appeared to have plenty of money, pretended not to notice. This was Aldo's cue. Through the aperture created by the lifted elastic he put the cockroach which, enjoying the warmth of soft flesh, scuttled for darkness.

Aldo, swaying less and his vision now almost back to normal, leaned against the wall, watched and waited.

'Why are you staring at me like that?' asked the girl.

'I am waiting for you to begin your dance.'

'Then you'll wait there for ever, because I don't dance.'

'Nevertheless, I think soon you will begin to dance. I am a patient man. I have plenty of time. So, by your leave, I will watch and wait for you to dance.'

'What makes you so sure I shall dance?' asked the girl, now growing a little uneasy.

'It never fails,' replied Aldo happily. Even if ten thousand devils were gnawing at his vitals, soon there would be compensations.

'What never fails?' she asked, now really alarmed.

'If you will buy me a drink, I will tell you,' replied Aldo firmly.

'All right, I agree.'

'The drink first,' countered Aldo, whom life was making as hard as Toni. 'Have no fear. Once I have the drink in my hands, I will tell you why you will dance . . . if you have not already begun to dance.'

Fumbling in her bag, for she was now in a state bordering on panic, the girl slammed down on the bar the price of a whisky. 'Now tell me!' she said shrilly.

'The reason you will dance,' said Aldo with relish, taking a swig of the whisky, 'is that asleep in your drawers is the largest cockroach I have ever seen, a beautiful cockroach with long, curling feelers. When he wakes, you will dance.'

With a convulsive movement, the girl began to search in her underclothing, awakening the cockroach. Then, as Aldo had predicted, she began to dance. She also began to scream.

It was a very active and elusive cockroach, so, vastly to the entertainment of everyone present, the terrified girl began to take off her clothes.

'The next time you spit in my face,' said Aldo happily to the frantic girl, 'I shall put a tarantula into your drawers. Remember that!'

At that precise moment Aldo happened to glance towards

the stairs which led to the living quarters above. It was there, standing under the hanging lamp, that Aldo saw the vision which – being a superstitious, or religious, man – made him resolve from that time forth to lead a better life. The vision was tall and slender, clad entirely in white, and wearing a halo.

‘Come on down, Kate,’ said Mary Simonides cordially, ‘you’re just in time to see the fun.’

The cause of all the fun was still whirling round the café, now chiefly to avoid a half-dozen or so willing volunteers anxious to aid her in the search for the cockroach.

Aldo watched as, slowly, reluctantly, Kate walked down the stairs, coming to a halt beside the bar. He saw now that she was a woman of flesh and blood, not a vision, and although she did not know it, Aldo was her willing slave.

‘This is Kate, boys!’ said Mary Simonides. ‘Be nice to her. Buy her a drink.’

‘I buy you a drink,’ said an enormous barrel of a man wearing a blue sweater, elbowing his way through the crush. ‘What you have? I pay.’

‘One port, eighty cents!’ replied Toni Simonides, pushing across the bar a glass of some pink liquid and giving change for a dollar.

Four other men bought drinks for Kate and Toni lined up four more glasses of pink stuff, taking eighty cents for each.

Kate stood there numbly. Nothing remotely like this had ever happened in her life, so there was no background of experience on which she could draw for guidance.

‘Better go through the motions of drinking ’em, Kate,’ said Mary with ill-concealed amusement. ‘The boys may not like it if you’re too high-toned with them.’

‘Yes,’ said the gorilla in the blue sweater, ‘costet eighty cents. Drink!’

Kate gagged on it, but somehow swallowed it. This pleased the gorilla, who put an arm round her, cupping a breast in his huge hand. Drawing her to him, he planted a great slobbering kiss across her mouth and nose. Then Kate screamed, but nobody seemed to hear, for the lady of the cockroach was still

screaming with rage as she tried to find the garments she had discarded. But Aldo heard Kate scream and knew that now, if ever, was his little moment. He had often wondered why the unknown father and his slatternly mother had spawned him in the Ligurian fishing village where he had been born to misery. He had asked the priest once why God had nothing better to offer him than toil and hunger. The priest, who no more knew the answer than Aldo had known it, dug out the good old standby of God's inscrutable ways and sent him on his way, wishing that he could have found a better formula.

But now it was different. Now Aldo knew and, clad in a suit of shining armour, came forward to do battle for this glorious creature whose ethereal beauty had smitten him like a blinding light. Taking a bottle from the bar, Aldo swung it with medium force so that the base struck Kate's barrel-chested assailant neatly under the right ear. The latter sighed deeply, seeming to deflate in the manner of a toy balloon and, sinking to the floor, lay with his face in the pool of Aldo's vomit.

If Toni saw what had happened – and it was inconceivable that he did not – he gave no sign. There was the flicker of a smile as he watched Kate's vain struggles in the arms of the next suitor. As his wife, Mary, had said, Toni did not care greatly for women who were standoffish, or gave themselves airs, and it amused him to see Kate dealing with first principles.

The second man lost interest in Kate when Aldo's bottle tapped him under the ear, whereupon a third stepped into the breach. This one tore Kate's gown, which displeased Aldo, who broke his nose with the bottle before tapping him under the ear.

'All right, Aldo,' said Toni sardonically, 'enough is enough. You knock out my customers, they don't buy no more drinks.'

Toni surveyed Kate with a critical eye. The merchandise was being handled rather too roughly. 'Have a drink, boys,' he said to the two remaining candidates for Kate's favours. 'It's on the house.'

These last were magic words, meriting full attention. They abandoned their quarrel. Drinks on the house!

Toni poured out two slugs of whisky into each of which went five drops of what he and Mary called 'soothing syrup'.

'Here's luck, Toni!' said the two men simultaneously, swallowing their drinks. They would not speak again for the next six to eight hours. Later, when things quietened down for lack of vertical customers, Toni or Mary would go through their pockets just for luck.

'They're nice boys,' explained Mary, 'even if they do get a bit high-spirited sometimes. But there's no malice in them.'

To this Kate had nothing to say, but, turning to Aldo, she smiled her thanks. 'We're broad-minded 'ere, Kate,' said Mary, 'so if you want to take 'im upstairs for a bit, don't mind us.'

Many weeks of worry, the last three nightmare days, culminating in the den of wild beasts in which she now found herself, had not so much driven Kate to the borderline of insanity as numbed her thought processes. She could not get her thoughts in order. It was all horrible. That went without saying. But now nothing made any sense at all. Mary Simonides, whom she had regarded as being kindly disposed, was quite obviously enjoying the situation. Toni, true to form, was indifferent. But try as she would, Kate could not understand why Mary, who was now showing her true colours, had troubled to rescue her from the Broadway Hotel. There had to be a motive, but what motive?

Every unanswered question led to others. Pavelitch - he had said so - was a friend of Mary and Toni Simonides. Pavelitch had always been kind and courteous. Had that just been a blind for something else? And again, if so, why?

There were no answers, only questions, which went on and on, multiplying themselves and ending in utter confusion.

A man who had been sleeping at a table during all the uproar now lurched towards the bar, a raging thirst gnawing at him. He saw Kate. Resting his unshaven chin on her bare neck, he kissed her ear, the while murmuring something in a language Kate had never heard. As they stood like that, sleep overcame the man again. Unable to bear his crushing weight on her shoulders, Kate collapsed, allowing him to drag her down with him.

It was Aldo who came to the rescue again. Dragging the man clear of Kate, he helped her to her feet, standing for a moment with eyes downcast, fearing to offend her by gazing at her loveliness. 'Lady,' he said thickly in English, 'go from this place. It is not for you.'

'It's time Aldo had his soothing syrup,' said Mary Simonides, pouring out a tot of whisky and adding the five drops considered safe in these cases. 'Here you are, Aldo. Have a drink . . . on the house.'

Aldo took the proffered glass, threw down its contents in one gulp and slid quietly to the floor. Kate looked down at him sadly. He was not much. Stunted by bad feeding in his extreme youth and brutalized by hardship ever since, he had not altogether lost the look of serenity which belongs, or should belong, to the pure in heart. He had done that day what few men had ever succeeded in doing: he had swallowed six of Toni's whiskies. He was entitled to his rest and, like a warrior in defeat, he lay at his lady love's feet.

Through some mysterious alchemy which she did not pretend to understand, Kate drew strength and courage from Aldo. Perhaps it was the knowledge that in this great sprawling city built on the mudflats of the Whangpoo she had one friend. Now that there was nobody to fight for her, she would fight for herself.

Kate's father had been a good man, but ineffective. Her mother, whom she scarcely remembered, had been one of a tough Scotch-Irish family from Northern Ireland, bristling like a porcupine with all the prickly and awkward virtues, warm-hearted and generous to their friends, but coldly unforgiving towards their enemies. Now in the hour of need, Kate called upon her mother's spiritual resources.

'Having lots o' fun, eh?' called Mary Simonides derisively.

'Tell me, Mary,' said Kate, now completely in control of herself, 'have I ever done you any harm?' The other did not reply, except with a blank look, so Kate continued: 'Then why, will you explain to me, did you bring me to' - her gesture embraced the whole sordid scene - 'all this? I don't understand, Mary,

and if I'm going to go on living, it's important that I should understand. I want to know why it gives you so much pleasure – and I've watched you, loving every minute of it – to see me hurt, humiliated, mauled by these wild beasts. Do you want to destroy me? Is that it?'

'I'd like to see that ladidah look wiped off your smug face,' replied Mary Simonides. 'Who do you think you are . . . to look down your nose at people like us? You, a saucy tart that can't even pay a hotel bill! It's time you woke up to y'rself, Miss Kate Marlowe . . . an' stop lookin' at me like that!' she said, her voice rising to a scream, as she saw herself fixed by Kate's ice-cold grey eyes which, a few moments earlier, had been no more than gently wondering.

Unable to endure this searing gaze any longer, Mary Simonides reached out a dirty hand with which she clawed two furrows down Kate's cheek, narrowly missing her eye.

Kate did not even flinch, but in a voice which grated said: 'Mary Simonides, you're going to regret that the longest day you live.'

'Hullo,' said Toni in a lack-lustre tone, 'whatch'ou done to your face?'

'That's your wife's work,' replied Kate. 'She doesn't like me, so she tried to scratch out an eye.'

Quite unemotionally and without heat, Toni took a supple cane from a shelf under the bar and with it proceeded to beat Mary who, face, shoulders and arms covered with bleeding weals, sank shrieking to the floor. 'You was told not to mark her up,' he said coldly. 'Next time, mebbe, you'll do as you're told.'

Mary looked venomously at Kate, who said with a smile: 'That's only a beginning, Mary. There's more . . . much, much more to come, and I'm going to enjoy it all.'

Men, mostly seafaring men, seemed to come into The Acropolis in waves. They would arrive in groups of five or six, clamour for drink and, according to their natures, fight, become amorous or fall asleep at one of the marble-topped tables. Those who fell at

...tushy, soothing syrup or
...at night into a rear room by Chinese
...his wife, would rummage their pockets at leisure.
*The roadway outside The Acropolis was, technically, under
the control of the Shanghai Municipal Council, the governing
body of the International Settlement. But inside the door was
China. Chinese police had the right of entry, but provided that
Simonides paid his assessment of graft, they were glad to leave
the place alone. If foreigners wished to poison themselves with
bad liquor, or fight like wild beasts, it was their privilege. Years
later, The Acropolis and other dives were put under the jurisdic-
tion of the International Settlement, the Chinese being only too
glad to be rid of them.*

As the successive waves of newcomers entered The Acropolis, most of them clustered around Kate who, to their uncritical eyes, was vastly superior to the general run of seaport doxies they encountered in their travels. Such is human adaptability, Kate soon learned a technique of defence which made survival possible. She would wink and smile at the man on her left, at the same time squeezing the arm of the man on her right, leaving each to think that he was the chosen suitor and that in due course the other would be eliminated from the contest. Toni's rotgut whisky saw to the rest.

Kate did not know how she was going to survive the night, for sheer weariness had put lead weights on her, but she knew that only by playing one against the other did she stand a chance. Careful observation of Toni and Mary Simonides suggested that they were waiting for some specific thing to happen. Whatever that might turn out to be – Kate's desperate plight made her fall back on such fallacious thinking – it was bound to be an improvement on what she was enduring.

More than once, Kate contemplated running out into the night and taking her chances on what might happen. But running where? The Acropolis was bad enough, but she had seen enough of the district in daylight to know that there were more terrors outside. Better the terrors she knew and was beginning to understand.

Relief came from an unexpected source. At some time during that interminable night, the street door was opened, admitting gusts of sweet air. Kate heard a heavy, purposeful step come stomping towards the bar. 'Hey! Lay off that girl, you great apes!' bellowed a stentorian voice, which Kate took to be that of a man. She turned in time to see a huge, elephantine woman waddling towards her. The newcomer flung the men off Kate as though they were sacks of straw. One swarthy Levantine, who had buried his face in the curve of Kate's neck, was seized by the hair with one arm and the slack of the pants with another, and thrown across the room, where he lay whimpering with a broken arm.

Belle Darling—for it was she—had been her own 'bouncer' for years and even strong men feared her ferocious bull strength. One man showed fight. He was the mate of a sailing ship out of Riga, a hard man with the pale-blue hangman's eyes of a Lett. No woman was going to push him around. Belle Darling laughed. She was enjoying herself. It was like the good old days. The Lett lost all interest in events as a snake-like rubber truncheon, loaded with shot, took him behind the ear, while Belle's right knee drove to his groin, administering what she called playfully an 'Irish uppercut'.

It was an awe-inspiring performance, causing even Toni Simonides to show a gleam of interest in his black eyes. 'Which one of these apes scratched your face, Kate?' asked Belle.

'That one,' replied Kate, pointing to Mary Simonides, who was cowering behind the bar.

'S'all right, Belle,' said Toni tonelessly. 'I beat her up good.'

'But not enough. Teach her to mind what she's told. Go on, or d'you want me to do it for you?'

Kate, who was not far from breaking point, felt herself being picked up and slung over the shoulder of this mountainous woman, who carried her upstairs and, with surprising tenderness, laid her on the bed.

From below came the sounds of Toni beating his wife and her whimperings. 'He's beating her because you told him to,'

said Kate wonderingly. 'He's frightened of you . . . they're both frightened of you. Why?'

'They're scared of me all right, Kate, but that's not why he's beating her. He's beating her because he enjoys it. It's the only fun he has . . . the poor sad bastard!'

Kate lay where she had been put, her eyes rounded in horror as she contemplated the changes wrought in her. A few months ago, she mused, the thought of a man beating his wife like a disobedient dog, could have produced nothing but loathing and disgust in her, but now she felt no more than a detached, colourless pleasure as the sounds from below gave proof of the existence of retributive justice. Mary Simonides was paying an instalment of the debt she owed.

'Who are you?' asked Kate, 'and how do you know my name?'

'I'm taking you home with me. We'll talk in the morning when you've had some sleep. But my name's Belle Darling. Heard it?'

'No,' replied Kate, 'but it's a name I've seen somewhere on a brass plate. It will come back to me.'

Kate remembered a carriage drawn by two spirited ponies and a drive of indeterminate length, and after that clean linen and a soft mattress. Before sleep claimed her, she glanced at her left hand where, tightly clutched, was a tiny gold medallion on a thin gold chain. Then she remembered the Italian seaman, whose championship of her had been the only glimpse of human decency in a den of wild beasts. The young man had taken the medallion from around his own neck, pressed it into her hand and, in an attitude that was reverential, had dropped to his knees to kiss the instep of her foot.

Kate looked up into the face of the woman standing at the end of the bed. 'I don't know who you are, or what you want with me,' she said as a deadly weariness came over her, 'but I expect, like all the others lately, it's something bad. Soon, I'll be able to think, but not now . . .'

Thirteen

A note in Kate's handwriting, lying loose in the Memory Box, undated, was almost certainly written about this time and related to the predicament in which she found herself: 'It is only women who haven't fallen who speak of fallen women. Those who have, call themselves whores. I wonder if I shall.'

THE ROOM in which Kate slept until mid-afternoon was a part of a suite forming Belle Darling's private living quarters, which had a discreet entrance at the rear of the premises. A note left conspicuously on the bedside table read: 'Ring when you want anything.'

After a bath Kate rang for breakfast. A smart, courteous boy brought tea, fresh toast, butter and marmalade, served appetizingly on a clean, crisply laundered traycloth. Having no clothes of her own, Kate put on a *négligé* which she found in the wardrobe. 'Missee say when you ready you come nex' room,' said the boy, indicating a door on the other side of a narrow corridor.

It was nearly dark before Kate, rested and feeling better able to face the world, knocked on the door of Belle Darling's office-cum-boudoir and heard the other's bellowed invitation to enter.

'Either you got a clean conscience, or no conscience at all, Kate. Which is it?' asked Belle, looking up from her desk. 'D'you know you've slept fourteen hours?'

Kate smiled, but ignored the question

'The way some people talk,' the other continued amiably, 'you'd think a cat-house was all profit and no expenses. Look at that!' she went on, thrusting a closely-written sheet under Kate's nose. 'That's just replacements and breakages . . . for one month.'

'I won't ask what a cat-house is,' said Kate dryly, 'because I think I can guess. Is this one?'

'Yep! You take on fast, Kate.'

'I have none of my own clothes. Does that mean I'm a prisoner here?'

'No, it just means your bags haven't arrived yet. They'll be here soon. Then, my gal, you'll be as free as the air.'

'Thank you. I just wanted to know,' said Kate quietly. 'I believe one can face almost anything, knowing everything. Would you please tell me where I am, who you are, why I'm here and . . . things like that.'

'This bein' a cat-house, Kate, and you bein' the best-looking female on the China Coast, I guess you're smart enough to know why you're here . . .'

'You mean that I'm expected to become a . . . harlot?'

'That's about the size of it, Kate,' replied Belle, wondering at the other's directness, 'only we don't call 'em harlots any more. That's a preacher's word an' we don't get many preachers here. For the rest, I'm Belle Darling, and if you're half as smart as I think you are, you'll make so much money so quickly that it isn't true.'

'And you? What will you make?'

'I'll make plenty too. Now and always, Kate, you can trust Belle to look after her cut. Believe me, there's plenty for both of us.'

'And if I refuse?'

'If you refuse, Kate, that's it. You go out of here when you like and all I'm out is the hotel bill you owed to Pavelitch.'

'I see,' said Kate thoughtfully. 'You paid him that? As a kind of speculation . . . on me?'

'That's about it, Kate.'

'What do I call you?'

'Call me Belle.'

'You see, Belle,' said Kate in a low voice, 'I've had a bad time lately and it's made me feel stupid. I'm not really stupid, but you mustn't mind if I ask a lot of questions. For instance, if I become a . . . if I work here, does that mean I have to submit to any man who . . . wants me? Creatures like those at The Acropolis?'

'If you work with me, Kate, the price ticket on you will be more than those apes will earn in the rest of their miserable lives. The men I'm talking about are gennelmen . . . real gennelmen. If you're smart and let Belle handle things, one year from now, my girl, you'll be able to quit the life, go wherever you want to go . . . anywhere in the world . . . and lead the kind of life you want to.' Belle poured herself out a glass of champagne from the bottle open beside her. 'Care for a drink?' she asked.

'Yes, I'd like a drink, Belle, to celebrate . . . something, but I don't quite know what. Tell me, what do fallen women usually drink?'

'In this business, there are no "fallen women", Kate. We try to avoid labels, but if people insist on labels, we call ourselves whores . . . straight out of the Bible. Whores drink most anything they can get, Kate, but wise whores don't drink at all and, if I ever met one, you're going to be a wise whore, so start off the way you intend to go on.'

'All right, Belle, I'll drink a glass of lemonade if there is one,' said Kate, her voice taking on the edge of hysteria. 'I want to drink to my father's memory. My father wasn't a great man, but he had good ideas about most things. He once said to me, "Katie, my dear, the highest anyone can go is to the top of his class." Well, if I'm going to be a whore, Belle, I'm going to be a successful one. I'm going to the top of the class. I can't think of anything worse than being an unsuccessful whore.'

'Come down to the dining-room, my girl, and meet a dozen of them . . . every one of them on an express train for the gutter!'

Nothing like so self-possessed as she sounded, but still conscious of a new strength growing within her, Kate sipped the lemonade which the boy brought her. 'I'd like to sleep on it, Belle, and tell you in the morning. Is that all right with you?'

'Take your time, Kate. Nobody's rushin' you. Tell me,' she added, darting the question, 'are you a virgin?'

Kate shook her head.

'Then it oughtn't to take you too long to make up your mind,

my girl. You know the old sayin' . . . nobody misses a slice off a cut loaf.'

There had been so many lonely days and nights lately. This was just one more. Kate would not go down to eat dinner with the girls, so a tray was brought to her room. All really important decisions – it was now quite clear – were taken in loneliness. One could talk over a situation, but when the time came for decision, it had to be personal and alone. People liked to say that two heads were better than one, but that was for those who talked instead of deciding things.

So Kate spent this fateful evening alone, wrestling with her own private devils in the certain knowledge that it was futile to look outside herself for guidance. It was – she shivered – Kate Marlowe versus the World.

Kate stood before a mirror, stroking her lovely body almost luxuriously. It was, she now knew, her only asset. Hers was not a bad mind, but it was not good enough to be of interest to anyone. All the interest was focused on her body. Nobody cared about Kate Marlowe's soul, if she had one. Nobody was interested in her hopes, fears and ambitions. The world wasn't going to change for Kate Marlowe, so Kate Marlowe would have to adapt herself to the world and to the rules as she found them.

The rules, God knew, were simple enough.

The idea of chastity had always in Kate's mind had less to do with morality than with good taste. Decent, fastidious women were not promiscuous, which did not mean that a woman was damned by one fall from grace, although most of the people Kate had known back in England had thought so, or pretended to think so. In any case, the decision she was now faced with was not one of chastity or promiscuity. Women who lived promiscuously did so, presumably, because they liked it. There could be no other explanation.

Liking and personal choice had nothing to do with the decision now to be made. What was now to be decided was whether, or not, to embark upon a policy of cold-blooded exploitation of her

body, an exploitation differing in no way from that of a businessman seeking to extract the last ounce of profit from a valuable commercial asset. This, as Kate saw things, was the only possible way of approaching the matter. To think of it in moral terms was merely to confuse a simple issue.

Kate remembered with disgust and pity the girls in the village at home who, as the cant saying put it, found themselves 'in trouble'. The girls had never had anything worth while in exchange for their falls from grace. For a few moments of lascivious fumbling in a haystack, too frightened and inexperienced to have gained any pleasure from it, these wretched girls often wrecked and blighted their whole lives. There had been nothing remotely beautiful, or romantic, about these village seductions, nothing heroic. They never occurred as the direct result of a cleanly taken decision to live immorally.

It was essential, as Kate saw matters, that her decision be made in cold blood and altogether without self-deception. The only possible excuse for becoming a whore was to become the queen of the whores. Even so, becoming a whore must not be an end in itself, but a stepping-stone to something better. It would be at best a horrifying decision, but not necessarily worse than the alternative. What was the alternative?

It was not until she had spent long hours wrestling alone with her problems that Kate, with a calm detachment as though it was not her own but another life in the balance, made her decision firmly. Then, blowing out the bedside candle, she went down on her knees from force of long habit. But she did not stay there long, for it would have been a mockery to pray for guidance after the die had been cast.

Fourteen

A letter from the Anglo-Chinese & Far Eastern Bank, The Bund, Shanghai, advising Miss Kate Marlowe that the sum of \$75,000 (Mex.) had been paid to the credit of her account. There was no mention of the name of the payor. Kate began to write a sentence across it, but did not finish. 'This makes me a . . .' she says, flinching from the word.

JOHN INGLEBY had just returned from an extended trip, visiting the firm's offices in the Yangtze Valley, starting with Ichang, the most distant, followed by Hankow, Kiukiang, Wuhu, Nanking and Chinkiang. It was at Nanking that a large pile of personal mail caught up with him. Amongst this was Konstantin Pavelitch's laconic note to tell him that Kate had left the Broadway Hotel.

On arrival in Shanghai, even before he went to his office, Ingleby went directly to see Pavelitch. 'Where did she go?' he asked, trembling with anxiety.

'I hear since that Toni and Mary Simonides give her a job at The Acropolis . . . that's in North Szechuan Road somewhere.'

'If anything has happened to her, I'll make you sweat, Pavelitch. So help me God! I'll make you sweat.'

'If the lady wish to go away,' shrugged Pavelitch, the picture of injured innocence, 'how can I stop her?'

Ingleby did not wait to hear more. He had heard of The Acropolis and everything he had heard was bad. At a meeting of the Shanghai Municipal Council, of which he was a member and could have been Chairman had he wished, there had been talk of bringing pressure to bear on the Chinese authorities with a view to having the place closed down. Too many foreign seamen had been found in the vicinity of The Acropolis, drugged, injured, robbed and, on occasion, dead.

Ingleby's fastidious nose wrinkled as he pushed open the door

and breathed the blend of garlic, sweat, fried food and exotic tobaccos which came out to meet him.

Three or four sailors lolled at the bar with two women in soiled finery. Toni Simonides sat behind the bar reading a Greek newspaper, while Mary was at a table going through some accounts.

There was about Ingleby, difficult to pin down and define, a subtle air of authority. He seemed to wear it like an aura. Nobody in the café knew who he was, but everyone knew instantly that he was authority and, therefore, on the other side of the fence. Its effect upon Mary Simonides was to put her on the defensive, which made her merely aggressive. 'Well, you've got a tongue, haven't you?'

This was *lèse majesté*. Nobody spoke to John Ingleby like that. Anyway, not on the China Coast. 'Where is Miss Marlowe?' he asked coldly. 'I wish to speak to her.'

'Try lookin' under the tables,' said Mary pertly, turning a shoulder towards him. 'Anyway, who's talking?'

'Don't take that tone with me, my good woman! My name is Ingleby and, in case you don't know it, I have enough influence with the *Taotai* to have this place closed and you deported. So stop being impertinent and let me speak to Miss Marlowe.'

Mary shrugged her shoulders.

'What you say the name was?' asked Toni.

'Marlowe.'

'She a tart with carrotty hair?' asked Mary. 'Can't remember the name, but she was English, or so she said, and come 'ere looking for a job. But she was a bit too standoffish for our class of trade . . . only stayed her one evenin' and left.'

'Where did she go?'

'Well, she's not 'ere, is she? So she must 'a gone out. Where? How should I know where she's gone?'

Turning on his heel, Ingleby walked out of the place. He knew he would get no further information and what the woman said might be – probably was – true, although it was hard to see Kate in such a setting.

The next visitor to The Acropolis in search of Kate was Gordon Maitland, who had been away in Peking and Tientsin when Pavelitch's letter was delivered. Mary Simonides was out when Gordon arrived. He was young, did not look rich and, Toni judged, had no authority. So he did not trouble to be polite which, as events turned out, was an error of judgment.

A violent-tempered man at the best of times, Gordon felt his gorge rise at the Greek's deliberately insolent manner. 'I asked you politely whether you knew Miss Marlowe,' he said, reaching for the other's necktie and dragging him towards the bar.

The three or four customers in the bar at the time were hugely delighted, for Toni had many ways which were not endearing. Not one lifted a finger as Gordon, seizing the Greek by the hair, thumped his face down on to the bar counter to punctuate his questions. When it became apparent that Toni could not speak and that he was in great pain, he was ordered to write the answers to the questions.

In point of fact, Toni had written no more than 'I don't know' when Mary returned. Mary, who was still sore from her last beating, derived more pleasure than the customers from seeing her husband manhandled. What made it even better, as Mary saw things, was that Toni dared not end the inquisition by giving the required information. Scared as he was of what the newcomer might do to him, he was infinitely more scared of what Belle Darling would most certainly do if he betrayed the fact that Kate had gone to her house.

'Shall I fetch the police, Toni?' she asked calmly, knowing what the answer would be. Toni shook his head violently.

'You sound as though you're English,' said Gordon with ill-concealed horror in his voice. 'What on earth are you doing in a filthy hole like this? I came here,' he went on without waiting for a reply, 'because Pavelitch of the Broadway Hotel told me that an English girl, Miss Marlowe, was here. I can't believe that she was, but was she? Or do you think I'd better go on trying to thump it out of this chap?'

'Listen, mister,' Mary replied, wishing she dared reply affirmatively to the last question, 'you're the second one to come here,

chuck your weight about and ask questions about this Miss Whatsername. If she's the saucy, ginger-headed piece that came 'ere lookin' for a job, she's gone . . . an' good riddance. What's more, nobody 'ere don't know where she's gone, see?

'An' that, when you've finished with 'im, is my 'usband. So suppose you clear out of 'ere and leave us alone. Mind your business and we'll mind ours. Fair enough?'

Giving Toni's head one more thump for luck, Gordon Maitland walked out of the place, far from sure that these people had told him all they knew, but not knowing how, short of murder, he could extract the information from them.

Ever since seeing Kate with Ingleby at The Wheel and the disgraceful scene which followed, Gordon had been less sure that Kate had sold herself to Ingleby. Ingleby being what he was, it had looked that way to a jealous man. It was now imperative to find Kate, apologize to her and try to put their relationship back on its old footing. Kate was in his blood, almost never out of his mind. Love? He supposed it was.

Meanwhile, Shanghai seemed to have swallowed Kate unless, as was more likely, she had left the city, for it was incredible that her startling head of hair could remain invisible.

John Ingleby, with the means and facilities to make a thorough search, soon satisfied himself that Kate was not in Shanghai. She had not left by ocean-going ship, nor by one of the big river steamers. It followed, therefore, that she must have left by train, for there were no roads out of Shanghai. If by train, she might have gone to Soochow, or Hangchow, but more likely to Tientsin and thence on to Peking.

Ingleby was not in the accepted sense in love with Kate, but he was obsessed by her and it was all complicated by vanity. He had, so to speak, put his mark on Kate, who had now slipped through his fingers. He did not think it out thus cold-bloodedly, but he would rather have learned that Kate was dead than that she was with another man.

Ingleby did not know whether or not Kate was a virgin, but

there was about her an air of starry-eyed innocence and wholesomeness which, far more than mere beauty, were so necessary to a man whose sexual standards and appetites had been set by a diet of Chinese 'first-time pieces'. These children, not one of whose personalities had left the smallest impression, had passed in their hundreds through Ingleby's bed, coming from oblivion and going on to oblivion. They did not exist in memory as individuals, but as doll-like, die-stamped figurines coming off the assembly line of China's misery.

Ingleby's women did not have to have minds, only bodies, and it was to these peculiar tastes that he owed his own immaturity. Those who never saw below the surface—the many—saw John Ingleby as the suave, assured, successful man of the world, which was how he wished to be seen, little realizing the frightening insecurity which lay below.

The Saturday after Kate's arrival at Belle Darling's house was the last day of the spring race meeting. Ingleby, who had mounts in four races, won two of them, riding against men half his age. After one hard race, he was compelled to feign a strained leg muscle in order to mask an attack of dizziness and so expose for all the world to see the havoc which time had wrought. He loved to overhear snatches of conversation about himself: 'Rides like a young man . . . wouldn't think he was a day over thirty-five!' Once—he shook with rage when he remembered it—he had overheard one of his own juniors remark to a friend: 'Poor old Ingleby's getting a bit long in the tooth . . . lucky if he doesn't break his neck one of these days.'

The man in question wondered why he was passed over for promotion and went on wondering until he came to the conclusion that he had no future in the firm of Ingleby & Waters.

On this Saturday, after the dizzy spell had passed, Ingleby saw the mountainous figure of Belle Darling hovering near by, but appearing ostentatiously not to see him. It was Shanghai etiquette that madams and the girls from down The Line made no public sign of recognition unless specifically recognized first. Some men, of whom John Ingleby was one, did not care one way or

another. He made his own rules. 'Hello, Belle,' he said, 'what's on your mind?'

'I got somethin' for you, John. Better come in 'n see her to-night . . . before the wolf pack begins to howl. This is special, John. You know old Belle wouldn't say that if she didn't know what she was sayin'.'

'You'd try to sell me the Empress Dowager . . . if you thought you'd get away with it.'

'I would at that,' she chuckled obscely. 'Be seeing you.'

He was her best customer, even if hard to please. They would have done more business together over the years, if it had not been that youth and innocence were so rare on the Shanghai market. But in Belle's simple and practical philosophy, a man with Ingleby's money and prepared to pay the price, was entitled to his little peculiarities.

Belle Darling believed that she knew all about women. In fact, she knew a great deal and had evolved a private set of rules for dealing with them. Usually the rules worked. Most whores, she had learned over the years, were greedy and stupid and were easily controlled through their greed and stupidity.

Belle believed herself to be tough. But during the days of waiting while the scratches left on Kate's face by Mary Simonides were healing, these two women, with almost nothing except gender in common, spent several hours daily together, learning a lot about each other and, indirectly, about themselves. Belle, who believed that she feared nothing and nobody, learned uncomfortably and, in ways she could not put into words, that of the two of them Kate was essentially the tougher. Although she would not admit it, even in the privacy of her thoughts, her respect for Kate amounted to fear. Somehow Kate had gained a moral ascendancy, which made Belle feel like the blustering bully that she was, and where Kate was concerned she knew a vague sense of foreboding. More than once, so strong was this feeling, she was tempted to drive Kate out of the house. It was only greed which stayed her hand, for she was sure

that Kate, properly exploited, was a potential gold-mine.

Belle was full of good advice to Kate about the life on which she was embarking, but Kate swept it aside. 'I prefer to learn in my own way,' she said calmly. 'When the time comes, I shall know what to do.'

'All the same, honey, you can save yourself a lot of grief by listening to me. I learned it all the hard way.'

'You don't have to waste time being sorry for me,' said Kate with her wintry smile. 'I'm doing what I'm doing with my eyes wide open. Spare your sympathy for those who get in my way.'

Belle gave up trying then. 'Kate, honey,' she announced one evening, 'you got comp'ny comin' around nine o'clock, so smarten yourself up and wear a great big smile. Leave the rest to Belle.'

It was not the moment, she believed, to tell Kate that her visitor was John Ingleby. Nor, in her talks with Ingleby, had she revealed Kate's identity.

Kate was the first to recover as Ingleby, hat in one hand and a huge bouquet of flowers in the other, entered the room looking incredibly foolish. 'Good evening, Mr Ingleby,' she said with a smile which only just missed being a smirk. 'How nice to see you again! Belle should have told me . . .'

'Miss Marlowe! What on earth are *you* doing in this place?'

'I could ask you the same question, Mr Ingleby, but . . . well, it answers itself, doesn't it? I hope I am not being too crude, but I came here to sell what you came to buy. I have a better excuse than you have, because I came here from necessity, whereas you're here from choice. There's a big difference, isn't there? The important thing is that we're both here, not why we came. Don't you agree?'

Kate was able to regard John Ingleby much as a fisherman regards the worm wriggling on a hook. This unrehearsed meeting had stripped him of all his pretences. The flush in his cheeks had gone to the ears, which were bright crimson. He had no words and could not trust himself even to try to speak. He was no longer the mature man of the world, but a blushing, uncomfortable boy, caught doing something he was ashamed of.

At their last meeting, Kate now realized, all the advantages had been with John Ingleby. But now the tables were turned and she knew exultantly that she was in command of the situation, that it was in her power to lead him by the nose into any kind of folly. Kate despised him more than she had ever despised anyone. It was not hate, for there was no reason for hate. She felt no real animus against him. When she had been an innocent young woman, appallingly ignorant of the world, with only the drunken old Rosalie Jenkins for background, John Ingleby had been willing to exploit her defencelessness. Now, looking at him through narrowed eyes, she saw him as he really was. He was a money machine, a man equipped with acquisitive instincts, money and an understanding of money, but pitifully little else, except the ability to ride a good race. Oscar Wilde's definition of a cynic, relatively new then and which Kate had just read, fitted John Ingleby like a glove: 'A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.'

Well, that was fine, for Kate Marlowe was going to cost him plenty and, by the money standard, he would appreciate her accordingly.

'Don't you think, Mr Ingleby,' said Kate at length, 'that it might be less . . . embarrassing if the sordid financial details were discussed with Belle?'

'No, never!' shouted Ingleby. 'Forget that Belle ever existed, or that I've seen you here. Have you a banking account?'

'Yes, I have a balance of two dollars and a few cents at the Anglo-Chinese Bank.'

'Tomorrow,' said Ingleby, 'I will pay to your credit a large sum and I will arrange for an allowance to be paid to you every month. From then on, I beg you, let us never discuss money again. One more thing. If I make the necessary arrangements, will you please move out of here this evening . . . now. By the time you get to the Astor House Hotel, you will find a suite reserved for you.'

In Belle Darling's boudoir-office a bare five minutes earlier, Belle, who lacked Kate's perception and thought of him as an urbane man of the world, had said: 'Take her along easy, John.'

She's new to the business and a mite shy. She's been kept on ice for you special.'

'As a personal favour to you, Belle,' Ingleby had replied, nettled by this advice, 'I'll try not to behave like a drunken sailor.'

If Belle Darling had understood men as well as she believed she did, she would have known that it was Ingleby, not Kate, who needed to be gentled. It was Ingleby who liked things wrapped up in pretty phrases. Kate never would quite recover from the spiritual shock of selling herself, but having made the decision, refused to boggle at it. Belle Darling's knowledge of men had been gained in the hard school of experience, but Kate's knowledge of them was instinctive. If Ingleby wanted their sordid bargain to be invested with the aura of false romance, then that was what he should have.

'Why, why,' asked Ingleby sorrowfully, 'did you let things get to this pass? Why didn't you come to me? Surely you *knew*'—there was a distinct *tremolo* in the word—'that I would have helped you? You didn't even cash the cheque I gave you. Why? I wish I understood. And now this!'

It was probably true, in the much-quoted words of the Chicago shopkeeper, that the customer was always right, but this was too much and Kate could not allow him to get away with it, whatever it might cost.

'Then, or now, what is the difference?' asked Kate, seeing Ingleby flinch in the glare of her cold grey eyes. 'Supposing I had come to you for help, what would you have wanted in return?'

'Please . . .'

'Well, what *would* you have wanted?'

'I suppose,' he said shamefacedly after a long pause, 'that you are right. I would have wanted you.'

'I knew that then, you see,' continued Kate, 'but I wasn't desperate enough to give you what you wanted. To have cashed your cheque and given you nothing in return wouldn't have been honest. Anyway, not as I see things. Now it's different. I'll take your money and try to give you value for it.'

At this precise moment, Belle Darling burst into the room

followed by a boy with a bottle of champagne and three glasses. 'My, my, my!' she exclaimed, planting herself in a chair with all the grace of a hippopotamus, 'but it's thirsty work listenin' at keyholes! Seems to me you nice people are havin' a hard time gettin' together. Can old Belle help?'

'No!' said Ingleby angrily from the door. He had gone.

'My! But you were tough with him!' said Belle, swallowing a glass of the wine in one gulp. 'Even in a whorehouse, Kate, they like a little *romance* with it.'

'No, Belle, I'm not tough . . . not yet. It's taken a while for me to understand that I've only got one thing the world wants badly enough to buy from me. I didn't want to be a whore. I don't want to now. He wanted to make me a whore from the first moment I met him, but he isn't man enough to admit it. Tough? You think you're tough, Belle, but wait and you'll see something. Little Kate hasn't started yet!'

'Mebbe,' said Belle, startled by what she saw and heard, 'but remember that molasses catches more flies than vinegar, which is as true as ever, specially in this business. Be as tough as you like, honey, but give the poor guys some molasses with it.'

In her evil life, Belle believed she had seen and heard everything. But now she was beginning to wonder. She had known them to weep; she had known them to bluster, to fly into hysterics. She had known them to be truculent, defiant, balky as mules, suicidal, maudlin, but she had never seen on a girl's face the mixture of contempt, determination and something else, which defied analysis, she had just seen on Kate's.

'Don't take it too hard, honey,' said Belle in the nearest she could get to gentle tones. 'If it ain't the best way to live, it's the hell of a long way from bein' the worst. It's better than slingin' hash, emptyin' piss-pots or bein' married to a drunken bum. I know, becos I've done all three for a livin'. A whore may go t'hell, like the preachers say, but if she uses her brains she goes there in style!'

'I don't know where I'm going, Belle,' said Kate through gritted teeth, 'but I'm going there on a soft seat, wearing all the fancy clothes I want and, by God! I'm going there alone.'

I'm through with being poor, not knowing whether tomorrow I'm going to eat a meal or have a roof over my head. I'm through with the copybook maxims, too, and the "blessed are the meek" nonsense I was brought up on. I've been meek and I know how far it gets you . . . mud splashes from the carriages of the people who've woken up to themselves. I'll play fair with those who play fair with me, but God help the others . . .'

'Easy, honey, easy! You listen to Belle, becos old Belle can save you a pile o'grief.'

'No, my listening days are over. Every man I've met in the East . . . except one . . . wanted only one thing from me, to get me into bed. Some wanted to pay. Some wanted it for nothing. But you're as bad as they are, Belle, or even worse, because you want me to become a whore so that you can make money. Well, don't count on making too much. Don't count on making any at all . . . not without earning it, and don't give me a lot of sweet talk, because all it does to me is to make me feel sick!'

'Attagirl! You'll show 'em!'

When Kate was alone, she found in the bottom of her trunk the spray of maidenhair fern carved from jade and with it the pitiful shrivelled remnant of what had once been a white rose. 'Gordon, Gordon!' she sobbed bitterly. 'Why were you such a fool? It could have been so wonderful, but you threw it away.'

Fifteen

One of the few photographs of Kate which have survived relates to this period of her life. She is seated in a smart victoria in the drive of the Villa Eglantine. Beside her sits John Ingleby. They are an outstandingly handsome pair. They bear themselves with an elegant arrogance. It must be said too that they look happy. Standing in the porch of the villa is Old John, smiling, Buddha-like, inscrutable. Although seated, Ingleby seems to strut with pride of ownership. One is left with the impression that, Kate's version to the contrary notwithstanding, he had what he wanted from her.

IT WAS plain from the very beginning that John Ingleby was far more interested in fantasies than in realities. Although he had bought Kate, just as he might have bought a new pony, he allowed a few days to elapse before taking possession of his purchase. That way, his curious mind allowed him to believe, the flavour of a commercial transaction was washed away by the magic of time. When he spoke to Kate, his voice was hushed and reverential, although to the discerning ear there was a jauntiness beneath it.

Kate spent two days entirely alone in her suite at the Astor House. Flowers arrived and several ardent notes. On the third day Ingleby arrived in person to drive Kate to a small house in the French Concession where, if she approved, they would create a discreet little love nest. The house, in style rather like an ornate Riviera villa, was at the end of what the English, but not the French, call a cul-de-sac. The garden was surrounded by a high wall.

Kate had refused to occupy another house which Ingleby already owned, because it had emerged under questioning that several girl friends had been installed there over the years. An

impudent Chinese staff engaged by Ingleby had served all of the ladies in question. 'No, thank you,' Kate said firmly. 'I don't care for the idea of camping on the dead ashes of your old camp-fires. Let's find something without memories.'

So, through an agent, they found the *Villa Eglantine*, a small private world in which, when the heavy wrought-iron gates clanged shut, life would be one long honeymoon. John Ingleby's capacity for self-deception was boundless.

Kate professed herself enchanted by the villa. 'But,' she said thoughtfully, 'I would like it to be mine. I don't fancy the idea of making it beautiful for some other woman, or women, when you grow tired of me.'

As Belle had pointed out to Kate, the psychological moment was 'before you deliver the goods'. Afterwards, experience had taught her, 'men get kinda forgetful'.

It was good advice and the *Villa Eglantine* became Kate's personal property. Furnishing it was a delight. There were glorious Peking carpets, brocaded silk hangings and upholstery, with a small army of skilled workers to finish everything quickly. Ingleby still behaved with admirable restraint, but there was now observable the edge of impatience in his bearing, for he was, as genuinely as it was possible for a man of his habit to be, in love with Kate. Anyway, he was infatuated, which looks much the same.

On the day of days, they dined together publicly at the French Club. There would come a time when Kate's notoriety would make this impossible.

Ingleby ordered the food and wines with extreme care. He had an understanding of both.

Kate's entrance into the dining-room was, as it almost always was, sensational. With a garland of flowers in her hair, and a gown of white satin, she looked like a child bride. 'By God,' Kate heard a man say, 'she looks young enough, even for an Ingleby!'

Ingleby heard it too, but it pleased him rather than otherwise, for he was inordinately vain about his youthful appearance and, of course, saw nothing wrong about his appetite for youth.

They danced several dances together, but spoke little, for a strange shyness had settled between them. So skilfully had the money bargain been pushed out of sight, there were present many of the factors which perplex real bridal couples. Dominating the entire evening was the double bed, a promise and a threat, always in mind but not discussed. Of the pair, it was Ingleby, the veteran of uncounted double beds, who suffered from nerves. This was—he insisted on it—a romantic love and he was determined to play the charade through to its conclusion. He had already forgotten the money payment which, if it was ever again allowed to come to the surface of his mind, would rank as a kind of marriage settlement.

It was Kate's serene, aloof and ethereal loveliness which disconcerted Ingleby. His hand shook as he poured the wine. It was the virginal quality in her which had from the beginning obsessed him. Was she, he wondered, a virgin? Her life before she had joined Rosalie Jenkins in Singapore was a complete mystery, but was it possible that she had survived the months in such company with her virtue intact?

Kate, during this interminable evening, was mistress of herself. For her there was not one particle of romance in the entire episode. Let Ingleby surround it with tinsel. It was his privilege and he was paying for it. The evening would end in a double bed. Kate had faced that. She neither looked forward to it, nor dreaded it. Her experience of a double bed was not great. Colin, the only man with whom she had shared one, had not been an amusing or exciting bedmate. Kate's chief memory of their encounters had been the smell of whisky.

This, Kate schooled herself to remember, was business. She had been well paid and, because she had a highly developed sense of justice, she would carry out her side of the bargain to the letter and in the spirit. She was playing a part and if the part demanded that she swoon, then she would swoon. A few months previously, it would not have seemed possible to Kate that she would sell herself in this way, but now, having done so, she scorned to turn it into a dramatic production. If John Ingleby wanted illusions, he should have them.

'Kate, my darling,' he whispered in her ear as they were waltzing, 'shall we go . . . home now?'

It was unfortunate that, just as Ingleby was steering Kate back to their table, a woman in a party which had just arrived looked at him with a half-angry, half-amused smile and remarked loudly: 'Hello, John. Up to your old tricks, I see!'

The woman, aged somewhere between forty and forty-five, had a tall, rather statuesque figure, with piled hair not unlike Kate's in colour, but without its brilliance. Kate had the fancy that in other circumstances she would have liked her, but resented the way the other stood, with unconcealed insolence, eyeing her from top to toe. Kate returned the gaze unflinchingly and it was the older woman whose eyes dropped first.

'Who was that?' asked Kate.

'My wife,' replied Ingleby uncomfortably. 'She has just returned from Europe.'

The encounter cast a gloom over the evening. They drove to the *Villa Eglantine* in a strained silence.

They stood in the driveway until the carriage had left. Then Ingleby, acutely conscious that the meeting with his wife had made the gesture somewhat absurd, carried Kate over the threshold. Kate did not laugh, but only because to have done so would have been so cruelly unkind. Closing the door and bolting it, he kissed her tenderly for the first time.

On the stairs and on the upper landing were masses of flowers, while from the bridal chamber itself came strongly the sweet smell of orange blossom, brought in a chill room from South China in an Ingleby vessel. 'All we need now,' Kate heard herself say, 'is a concealed choir singing *The voice that breathed o'er Eden*.'

'I suppose,' said Ingleby, trembling with rage, 'that to you that was funny. But if you ask me, it was in the worst possible taste.'

It was, too, as Kate was ready to admit a few moments later. But by then it was too late. The front door had slammed and Ingleby was stalking down the drive in a mood of black despair. The bride, instead of being fearful and tremulously eager, had

cracked a wicked joke. He doubted whether he would ever forgive her.

Kate, fleetingly regretting that an over-developed sense of the ridiculous had betrayed her into being less than kind, removed Ingleby's new silk pyjamas from his side of the bed, put his shaving kit and toilet articles out of sight in the bathroom cupboard, and went to bed, where she slept dreamlessly. She did not know it, but these two gifts, being able to see the ridiculous side of almost anything and the ability to sleep no matter what crisis hung over her head, were to make the years ahead tolerable.

John Ingleby was not a fearful man, but for several years he had lived in abject fear of being impotent. Bound up with it, of course, was the fear of ridicule. His craving for the solace of Kate's body had not diminished with his tragi-comic exit from the *Villa Eglantine*. Very much the contrary. Visions of Kate stood between him and everything he did, everything he wanted to do. As he now saw things, the only way in which he could redress the balance between them was to take her violently, brutally, if necessary by force. Before his own image could be restored, he had to see her beaten, submissive. But now he was caught up in a vicious circle in which fear of Kate's ridicule held him in chains. His postponed possession of her must be dramatic to be worth anything. If there were to be fear, he wanted to see it in *her* eyes. That, although he did not like to admit it, even in the privacy of his own thoughts, had been the chief, if not the only, attraction of the wretched Chinese children, a long succession of whom had been brought, terrified and weeping, to his bed.

But how to achieve mastery over a woman whose misplaced sense of humour enabled her to indulge in ribaldry at the most awkward, almost sacred, moments? When the time came, he had a strange certainty that if fear of ridicule made him impotent, it would destroy him.

Like many men brought up in the Far East, Ingleby shared the Chinese belief in the efficacy of aphrodisiacs. Some of the

largest Chinese fortunes had been made from their manufacture. Some were compounded of cantharides, others from powdered rhinoceros horn imported from Africa, while the majority consisted mainly of hocus-pocus and inspiring labels. A few were really dangerous. John Ingleby cared nothing for the danger, so long always that through drugs he might gain the mastery of the lovely Kate.

During the months which followed, some distressing scenes were enacted at the *Villa Eglantine* on evenings when Ingleby, tantalized to the limits of endurance, sought to gratify his lusts without success. The stumbling-block was his mind, not his body. The sight of Kate, enticing in filmy night attire, or stretched out in the nude waiting for him, was enough to conjure up a picture of an obscene choir lurking just off-stage, about to begin the refrain of *The voice that breathed o'er Eden*, while in the background, haunting, agonizing, came the gurgle of Kate's laughter.

During these months, which were not much easier for Kate than for the unfortunate Ingleby, he insisted upon their being seen together in public as much as possible. They had reserved tables at Louis Ladow's Carlton, at the French Club, at the Astor House and a French restaurant. They went to the races together, gambled at The Wheel where, under the expert tuition of one of Brentana's 'house' players Kate learned, first the rudiments, and later the finer points of poker. The rest Kate did not need to be taught, for she had a natural bent for the game. Thus, whatever had happened to the private image of John Ingleby, the public image was intact, if not enhanced. The whole world knew that he had set Kate up in the *Villa Eglantine* and the men, anyway, envied him his luck.

A needless affront was put upon Edith Ingleby when Kate, agreeing to do so before she had had time to realize the full implications, led in a winner with Ingleby in the saddle and wearing the Ingleby colours. Shanghai, never censorious, said mildly: 'He shouldn't have allowed that!'

During the week which followed, Edith Ingleby's lawyers served divorce papers on her husband, citing Kate by name.

'I doubt whether it will ever come to court,' Ingleby told Kate, 'but if it does, I have enough dynamite to blow it right out again . . . and Edith with it. In this envelope'—he tapped a sealed blue-linen envelope—'are the reports by private detectives on her recent behaviour in Europe. She was in a lot of beds . . . London, Goodwood, Paris, Baden-Baden and Monte Carlo, and not always with the same man.'

'Then why not tell her that you have the reports and end the matter?' asked Kate, who was beginning to understand this twisted man's character a little.

'She's saying things about me that I don't care to have said and I'm curious to see how far she will go. When these reports threaten to blow her reputation sky-high, I shall make her retract as a condition of not using them. She won't like that.'

At Ingleby's request, Kate stored the envelope in the safe built into the wall of her bedroom. He did not wish to keep it at the office and he had not yet consulted his lawyers about defending the divorce petition. Kate seemed to be the logical custodian of these damning documents.

Around this time, Kate learned to her amazement via Belle Darling, who came calling one afternoon, that John Ingleby had recently set up another love nest in Shanghai. Here, believing that nobody knew it, he had installed a young coloured dancer from New Orleans.

Some women . . . most women would have been jealous, or at least annoyed. Kate was neither. She felt a great pity for John Ingleby and, on the afternoon she learned this, was as near liking him as she would ever be.

'What's wrong with the poor bastard?' asked Belle, who was in a fever of curiosity. 'Ain't you enough woman for him?'

'Nothing's wrong as far as I know . . .'

'Then what's wrong with you, Kate?'

'Try asking John, Belle. Maybe he'll tell you.'

'Come on, honey, what's it all about? You can tell old Belle, eh?'

'No, Belle, I can't and I won't tell you anything, or even if

there's anything to tell. There's supposed to be honour among thieves, so why not among whores too?'

'You could be right, honey, but I've known a lot of whores and there wasn't a dime's worth of honour among the whole boilin' of them.'

'He's kept to his bargains with me,' said Kate stubbornly, 'and I'll keep to mine with him.'

'Watch out, Kate my girl,' jeered Belle, 'or you'll find yourself stuffed and put in a glass case . . . a whore with ethics, the only one in captivity. Honey, you'll be mighty lonely.'

'I am already, Belle,' retorted Kate, repressing a sigh which almost became a sob.

Sixteen

In the Memory Box was a thick wad of press cuttings dealing with the death and funeral of John Ingleby. The list of those who attended the funeral service was three columns in length. None of these cuttings was annotated by Kate. She reveals nothing of what she felt at the time. Not much, one is tempted to believe.

THE DAY was May 11th, 1904. There are several versions of what happened on that day. The first version appeared in the Late News column of the *North China Times*. It was brought in by a reporter a few minutes after midnight when, officially, the paper had 'gone to bed'. Here it is verbatim:

The death took place last evening of Mr John Ingleby, senior partner in the old-established China hong of Ingleby & Waters. The cause of death is understood to be internal injuries sustained a few hours previously when his mount, Cantonese Girl, swerved into the rails at the Shanghai Race Club. He cancelled a later riding engagement, but was observed, apparently in cheerful spirits, talking to friends.

It is understood that Mr Ingleby collapsed during a private dinner party with friends in the French Concession, and that by the time a physician arrived on the scene, he was past help. His death will be mourned by a great number of friends on the China Coast and elsewhere.

This brief item was a great deal nearer to the truth than what may be called the official versions, published the next day with long and laudatory obituaries. According to these, the death took place at 'Mr Ingleby's home in Avenue Road', and one account touched discreetly upon a 'pending divorce suit' hinting that 'Mrs Ingleby's fortunate presence in the house is believed to have indicated an imminent reconciliation'.

The sob-sister school of journalism did not exist in those happy days, so readers were spared a blow-by-blow deathbed reconciliation. Attempts to interview Edith Ingleby seem, mercifully, to have failed, but she was reported to be 'bearing her cruel loss bravely'.

The truth of the matter where Mrs Ingleby is concerned is that she spent the early part of the evening dancing with a young French naval officer and the remainder of the night tucked between the sheets with him until 9 a.m., when she read the *North China Times* account with her breakfast. 'No, Raoul, not now,' Shanghai gossip credited her with saying. 'We must show some respect and at least wait until after the funeral.'

True or untrue, the remark appears in Kate's diary for that week, together with the name of the gossip circulating the story. But as Edith Ingleby was a daughter of the manse and enjoyed a reputation for circumspection, if not piety, it is probably untrue.

Shanghai was not slow in identifying the 'friends in the French Concession' as the glamorous Singapore Kate. There was unanimity in rejecting all the published stories, but with a number of minor embroideries, the generally accepted theory was that John Ingleby, that doughty warrior in the lists of love, had met his Waterloo in Kate's bed, while endeavouring, with a weight-for-age handicap of thirty years, to satisfy her prodigious sexual demands which, so rumour had it, were beyond all reason.

A fair commentary on gossip of this nature is that nobody within six or seven thousand miles of Shanghai had any first-hand knowledge whatsoever of Kate's private habits. But its importance here is that John Ingleby's death was the foundation stone, so to speak, of the Singapore Kate legend. For more than thirty years after he was dead, the Ingleby legend went on growing parallel with it, until men and women who had never met him professed to believe him a satyr and Kate, by implication, a red-haired nymphomaniac who had dragged him to destruction in her bed.

The truth about that last evening of John Ingleby's life is far

less exciting than the other versions. Here it is, straight from the lips of the only person who knew the truth, taken down by tape-recorder nearly fifty years after the event and transcribed on to a typewriter. Leaving aside all questions of Kate's credibility as a person, the account of itself has the ring of truth:

John arrived in the late afternoon, coming straight from the race-course. He brought me a bunch of deep red carnations cut, so he told me, from his own garden with his own hands.

He had had a nasty fall, he told me, and his shoulder was giving him pain. He had with him a bottle of horse liniment, diluted a bit so as not to burn him. The vet had given it to him. I rubbed him with the liniment. He thanked me and his manner was very . . . tender, I suppose, is the word. We went downstairs and into the garden for a drink. I drank a tiny drop of whisky and a lot of soda, as I always did, just to keep him company.

He was charming to me that evening, really charming, and I found myself liking him more than ordinarily. He wanted me so badly, poor man, that there was a haunted look in his eyes. He had never taken me, as I told you, and I had the feeling that this terrible wanting me was driving him mad.

I took my courage in both hands that evening. You may believe me it wanted courage. I can't remember my exact words now, but I urged him in his own interests to leave me and not torture himself. Did that mean I was tired of him, he wanted to know? He flared up, losing his temper. He went upstairs, coming down with a bottle of those ghastly Chinese pills. I was told later that the proper dose . . . anyway, the safe dose, was two pills. I saw him swallow four and he may have taken others without my seeing him.

His temper calmed down and we behaved . . . normally, I suppose you would call it. He was due to go to England shortly after. Would I go with him? Things like that. Vanity had made him very touchy and I tried to convince him that my suggestion that he leave me was for his sake, not mine. He would be happier away from me. 'Haven't you *any* love for

me, Kate?' he asked me. I thought it kinder to tell him the truth, at least to the degree that I told him I didn't love him and wasn't likely to. I didn't tell him the real truth, which was that there were times when he made my flesh crawl.

After dinner, John appeared to be in great pain. I put it down to his shoulder and suggested that I send a boy for his doctor. But he wouldn't let me. Then he went up to bed, asking me not to be long following him. About fifteen minutes later, I heard him call me. There was a bump and when I reached him he was on the floor in agony . . . tearing at himself like a madman.

There was no time to send for his own doctor, so I ran to the end of the blind turning, where I had seen a doctor's plate. He came with me, but when we got back John was dead. He recognized John and insisted that we send for Dr Donahue, who was John's doctor.

The two doctors treated me inhumanly, as though I had no feelings. They made it plain that they believed that for *my* satisfaction . . . God! How things can be twisted! That for my satisfaction I was forcing him to take those terrible Chinese pills. As he was leaving, Dr Donahue said to me: 'I hope what I say now, young woman, will give you food for thought over the years to come, because in order to gratify your base appetites, you have allowed a fine man to flog himself to death.'

They took John away and I let them hatch up their own story.

I cried that night, something I rarely did. I don't think I have ever cried enough. I cried not for John, or even for myself, but for the kind of world we had made . . . so . . . so damned unkind.

That dried thing you have in your hand, although you wouldn't recognize it, is one of the carnations he brought me that day. He gave me many things . . . jewels and lovely examples of Chinese craftsmanship . . . many of the things in this room now . . . but somehow I always try to remember him by the dead flower . . . he cut it with his own hands and

it was the last thing he gave me . . . except of course my evil reputation and that wasn't altogether his fault.

John Ingleby was, of course, largely to blame for the growth of his own legend, because he delighted in his public image as a latterday Casanova. He enjoyed being slapped on the back and asked for the secret of perpetual youth, the sly digs when he had been seen dining and dancing with a new young charmer. But Kate was not to blame for the legends which grew around her name, nor the vile accusations made against her after it had all ceased to be a nine-day wonder.

Those of us who are remembered at all are usually remembered for something trivial, or untrue. King Alfred founded the British Navy, but forty generations of school-children learned that he burned some cakes. Kate Marlowe was not even John Ingleby's mistress, but there are hundreds of Shanghailanders alive today who never met her, but will assure you most solemnly that she was a kind of queen bee, who flew up into the atmosphere with her lovers and, when they were drained of all vitality, let them fall to destruction, and at the top of the list was John Ingleby.

This is no place to try to settle the rights and wrongs as between John and Edith Ingleby, even if possible or interesting, but there can be little doubt that the campaign of calumny against Kate—the notorious Singapore Kate—was fed and kept alive by Edith Ingleby, and that some of the most outrageous and absurd allegations which gained credence at the time, originated with her. She probably contributed her share to the unhappiness of the marriage, but it seems that she seized her opportunity of putting the burden on to the shoulders of another woman, so that she could appear in public as the injured wife of an ogre, or satyr, with whose appalling sexual habits and inclinations no decent woman could be expected to cope. Kate, as the last of a long list of women with whom it seemed he had enjoyed extra-marital fun and games, had to bear the brunt of it.

For several weeks after Ingleby's death, Kate found it impossible to be seen anywhere without being insulted. At least

two parsons preached pointed sermons *at* her and one of them, financed by Edith Ingleby and other 'Line Widows', as they were called, started an organization known as the Shanghai Council for Public Morality and Decency, which was far too big a mouthful ever to achieve much, and which the ribald nicknamed 'The Society for the Suppression of Singapore Kate'. The tame instrument of her malice was a shady parson called the Reverend Jonas Barnaby, of whom more will be learned later.

There came a day when, feeling like a moral leper shunned by the whole community, Kate realized with dismay that for nearly three weeks she had not spoken to anyone except her servants. On this day, when her spirits were at their lowest ebb, the Number One boy brought her a silver salver on which reposed Gordon Maitland's card.

'Ask him to come in,' she said, her heart leaping at his name. Gordon Maitland, it was plain to see, had 'drink taken'. He was far from drunk, but amiable and mellow. 'Beware of Greeks, et cetera, but I bring the gift of a real Melton Mowbray pork pie, made by a man just come out from Melton Mowbray itself. I would like much strong drink and half the pie. How are my chances?'

'It's very nice to see you, Gordon, but before I reply, I must look at my engagement book. Yes, you're in luck! You shall have all the strong drink you can swallow--and I doubt if that is very much--half the pork pie . . . with all the trimmings, which can be supplied here . . . and, my dear Gordon,' she added with a catch in her voice, 'you will never know how happy I am to see you, because you wouldn't possibly guess how unhappy I have been . . . for weeks. Thank you for coming.'

They drank several bottles of champagne that evening and, far more important, they laughed. Back in the servants' quarters, hearing the tinkle of Kate's laughter, the servants smiled happily, because in the East, certainly in those days, much of the happiness of a good servant of a good master or mistress was vicarious. Kate had been a good mistress and her laughter was the best sauce for their evening rice.

They kept it all on a light and unsentimental plane and it was

not until Gordon was leaving that he disclosed the prime purpose of his visit. 'I thought you should know, Kate, that there's talk of you being deported by the Consul-General. Your name's been bandied about a good deal lately. I heard it at the club. One of the juniors at the consulate, a little pervert with a double-barrelled name which I've forgotten, seems to have it in for you. D'you know him?'

'I had a little trouble with a poisonous young man there - I wouldn't know a pervert if I saw one, I'm afraid - when I tried to collect what was due to me from Rosalie Jenkins's estate. I didn't ask his name.'

'Well, if the Consul-General sends for you - and he can - walk softly. Above all, don't lose your temper, because he has tremendous powers and the Inglebys and their ramifications have more influence than you could guess. They want you out of China and, unless you are very careful, that's where you'll go. But maybe you want to leave?'

'I'll leave China when I'm good and ready to leave and not one minute before. The Consul was too busy to help me when I needed help desperately' - Kate was almost choking with indignation - 'and he let me sink. Little Kate has learned a few things since then, Gordon, and I'm not scared of them. I'm not scared of anyone . . . now.'

Seventeen

The Memory Box yielded evidence that Kate had, by several decades, anticipated the vogue known as the comic strip. Signed with the initials K. M. is a pen-and-ink sketch of the Villa Eglantine. Outside is a flagpole from which the Union Jack is being run down and the Italian flag run up. It is captioned: 'Down with the red-white-and-blue and up with the strawberry, pistachio and vanilla! What are you going to do about it Mr Bullfrog H.B.M. Consul-General? Three cheers for British prestige.'

'MY APPOINTMENT with the Consul-General was for eleven o'clock,' said Kate, rising to her feet. 'I came here at his request and I'm not waiting any longer. If he wants to see me, he knows where to find me. Good morning.'

'The Consul-General is extremely busy, Miss Marlowe, and cannot see you for another fifteen minutes,' said the unpleasant little man with the double-barrelled name. 'Furthermore, he did not request you to come here, he *ordered* you to do so, which is not at all the same thing, and you would be very ill-advised to leave until he has seen you. I don't think you quite understand the position. This Consulate-General has extra-territorial powers. All British subjects here are under the jurisdiction of the British Supreme Court for China, so that in effect you are living in England. Indeed, the Consul-General has powers which the authorities in England do not have. He can have you deported at his sole discretion . . . and there is no appeal from his decision. An official appointed by him would come to your home and, forcibly if necessary, put you on an outbound ship. So, Miss Marlowe'—he was enjoying this—'in your own interests I suggest that you do nothing hasty.'

Kate was about to sweep out when the door to the great man's

office was opened and she was ushered in. The Consul-General was coldly polite. Although considered pompous in an age which considered pomposity normal in officials, he was by instinct a kindly man. Furthermore, he was shocked by Kate's youth and appearance of innocence. There was no guile in her eyes and she reminded him of his own daughter.

'Miss Marlowe,' he began when they were alone, 'this is as distressing for me as it must be for you. I will be as brief as I can. I have asked you to come to see me because of reports received that your—er—mode of life in Shanghai is such that it reflects discredit on the entire British community. This means—and it is vastly important in China—that we lose face in the eyes of the Chinese. It is my duty to stop that.

'I am not condemning you unheard, Miss Marlowe, and when I am finished I will be happy to hear anything you have to say. But on the evidence I have before me, it would seem that there is no valid reason for you to remain in China. It may be, of course, that after what has happened you are preparing to leave. In that event . . .' He left the sentence hanging in mid-air.

'In plain English please, what am I supposed to have done, aside from living quietly in the French Concession under the protection of John Ingleby?'

'Why drag names into this, Miss Marlowe, especially the name of a man who is dead?'

'But this, sir, is about people. People have names. You don't hesitate to use mine.'

'Really, Miss Marlowe,' said the Consul-General, 'I can't see how your mind is working.'

'Then, sir, I will try to explain. Whatever I may have done to hurt the Chinese view of the British was also done by John Ingleby, was it not? Before John Ingleby died, everyone—and that includes you, sir—knew the relationship existing between him and me. Why, now that he is dead, take the matter up with me? Why not with John Ingleby—who dined with you on several occasions to my knowledge—while he was alive? Was it because you were frightened of John Ingleby when he was alive,

and are frightened of the rest of the Ingleby family now that he is dead?’

There was no answer.

‘Have I stated the position unfairly, sir?’ Kate persisted. ‘If so, I wish you would tell me where.’

‘It is a pity you were not trained to the law, Miss Marlowe,’ said the Consul-General, unable to keep his admiration from his voice and bearing, ‘because you would have made a fine advocate.’

‘It is as well,’ said Kate bitterly, ‘because mine is the only voice raised in my defence.’

‘Don’t you think,’ the other continued, ‘that in your own interests you should go? You are young and can make a fresh start somewhere else.’

‘Then you really think it would be in my interests to run away and, by doing so, admit the vile, filthy things which are said of me . . . is that it?’

‘How old are you, Miss Marlowe?’

‘I shall be twenty-five next birthday and of those twenty-five years I’ve lived a hundred of them in Shanghai,’ replied Kate, whose façade was beginning to crack.

‘Please don’t force me to take official action against you,’ said the other kindly. ‘Just wind up your affairs here and go. It should not take you more, say, than a month?’

‘I was taught to believe that only cowards and weaklings run away,’ said Kate valiantly, rising to leave, ‘and I’m neither. I’m staying and’ – she looked at him through eyes blazing with indignation – ‘I shall be here long after you are gone. Shanghai made me what I am, and if Shanghai doesn’t like its handiwork, it’s just too bad. I came here to this consulate to get help with my claim against Mrs Jenkins’s estate. I got no help . . . only sarcasm from that horrible little reptile in the next room. So please don’t expect me to care about British prestige in China, or what the Chinese think of us. You wouldn’t help me when I needed help desperately and, now that I don’t need it, you aren’t going to order me about.’

Long after Kate had left his office, the Consul-General stood gazing after her unhappily, for everything she had said struck

home. He liked to believe that his own daughter would have shown the same courage and quiet dignity under attack. Unless all his judgments of people were at fault, this pretty girl with the honest eyes was not the monster as represented to him. He sighed for his own lack of courage. The girl was quite right: enormous pressure was being exerted by the Ingleby family and connections, who had once been powerful and influential enough to push Great Britain into the Opium War against China to rescue Ingleby hot chestnuts. A request of the Inglebys was tantamount to an order and more than one consular career had been blighted for believing otherwise.

Not only the Inglebys, but the missionaries were pressing for this girl's removal from the scene, and the missionaries, like the Inglebys, had their ways of bringing pressure. Furthermore, they had no scruples when anyone in the consular service ran counter to their wishes and interests. Careers were poisoned from behind the scenes in Whitehall, while holy-joes in the House of Commons asked loaded questions calculated to discredit the offender.

He was nearing the end of a long and honourable career and he passionately wanted to draw his pension and go fishing. Thirty years previously, he had had the courage and the integrity, but that was before he had learned to swim with the tide.

Kate went out into the hot sun shaken by the strength of her emotions, revolting against the glaring injustices of life, but determined to fight. She looked angrily at the British Consulate-General, so splendidly housed where The Bund ended and the Soochow Creek began, the cornerstone of the great edifice—cold, calculating and caring nothing for the individual—known as British prestige. Frontage on The Bund cost vast sums per foot, yet the Consulate buildings, housing a handful of inky-fingered little clerks who enjoyed privileges granted only to princes elsewhere, stood in its own park. The buildings, instead of being garishly opulent like the German Consulate, were pleasingly shabby, conveying to the Chinese, as was intended, that here was no conscious effort to impress. It was magnificent in a land where

magnificence has always rated higher than virtue, except to the philosophers and sages.

German prestige was high, too, and like the British, rested upon a curious kind of magnificence. The Chinese did not care much for champagne, which caused flatulence, but they knew it was expensive and it did not escape their notice early in the game that at German consular receptions more empty champagne bottles were carried away afterwards than at any other affairs in Shanghai, not even excepting the French 14 July celebrations. One consulate, notorious for the economy of its hospitality, went so far as to keep empty champagne bottles in reserve, exposing them during the course of a reception.

It did not seem to damage British prestige at all that British bankers, working hand in glove with crooked Chinese politicians and corrupt Manchu princelings, were bleeding China white. Nor were the British alone in this. Russians, Germans, Japanese, Belgians and French were all in it, up to the neck in iniquity.

But—Kate's bitter musings came round in a circle inevitably to her own position—an English girl who, as an alternative to starvation, had allowed a married man to keep her, was deemed to have done more harm to British prestige than the smooth, black-coated rascals who came to China to fleece her and for no other purpose.

With chin tilted pugnaciously, Kate turned left out of the Consulate gates, following the Soochow Creek until she came to the burnished brass plate bearing the name of Belle Darling.

Belle would know what to do.

Belle did know what to do. 'It's a pleasure, honey,' she said. 'When that stuffed shirt bastard the Limey consul comes to give you the bum's rush, he won't know what's hit him. Will it work? Of course it'll work. How d'you suppose I've got Limey girls workin' in my house right now? Leave it to old Belle.'

From the earliest days of China's contact with the West, the chief reason—sometimes the only reason—why Westerners, a term which includes Europeans and Americans, went to China

was to rob, swindle and exploit the Chinese. Before extra-territorial privileges were granted to nationals of the Treaty Powers, this was not so easy, but afterwards, with freedom to go anywhere in China, it became absurdly easy to flout Chinese law with impunity. Some countries (like some individuals) were worse than others. Britain, the arch-criminal of the opium days, reformed to some degree, conniving at only the biggest, and therefore most respectable swindles. But it must be said in fairness that in the latter years a Chinese suing a British national in the British Supreme Court for China—the only court with jurisdiction—was in the main given justice. But against this, tens of thousands of pure-blooded Chinese born in Hongkong, Singapore, Malaya, Trinidad, Australia and elsewhere in the British Empire, roamed China freely enjoying extra-territorial privileges as British subjects, to say nothing of other thousands who were able to produce false affidavits in support of their contention that they were born in the British Empire.

The United States was also one of the more scrupulous powers in this respect, but did not emerge with clean hands. Chinese alleged to have been born in the Philippines, Hawaii and San Francisco, and claiming United States protection, did a lot of dirty work under cover of the American flag, while the United States Court for China sometimes turned a myopic eye on American swindlers and their activities.

The rascals of all nations flocked to China and grew rich and, things being as they were, their consular representatives grew even richer.

Although Italian business and trade interests in China were relatively trifling, the Kingdom of Italy maintained an extensive chain of consulates throughout the Flowery Kingdom. Quite often it happened that the Italian consular staff outnumbered the entire Italian community in the lesser Treaty Ports. Although, like most Italian public officials, these consuls and their minions were paid quite inadequate salaries, a long succession of them retired rich and full of something which, if it was not honour, had a tinsel glitter. Rumour had it that before an Italian could get an appointment to the consular service in China, a bribe

equal to five years' salary had to be paid to someone in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome.

Italy had no colonies with a Chinese population so Italian consuls, being practical Latins on the make, went straight to the heart of the matter. Italian naturalization was on sale to anyone with the price, for cash on the barrelhead. There are instances on record, for example, of wheelbarrow coolies arrested in the afternoon with loads of opium who, before their appearance at the International Mixed Court in the morning, were found to be Italians and, therefore, under the jurisdiction of the Italian consular court.

But it cost money, lots of it. Naturalization for a Chinese who did not have the police breathing down his neck cost around five thousand dollars, but to a man caught robbing a bank and wanting to be an Italian in a hurry, the price was higher, much higher.

The usual intermediary in these delicate affairs was an Italian lawyer named Commendatore Moschetti, to whom law was a lace pattern, full of holes. The only really pleasing thing about the man was that he did not attempt to cloak his skulduggeries with euphemisms. 'Your case, Miss Marlowe,' he said with brisk confidence, 'is extremely simple. I can arrange for you to become a naturalized Italian subject. This will cost you five thousand dollars, plus, of course, my fee, which will be a further two thousand. A less costly and on the whole preferable alternative is for you to marry an Italian subject. The chief difficulty there is to find one who is not already married . . . we Italians marry young, as you know. But if there is an Italian ship in port, I have no doubt we can find a bachelor who will oblige us. He would, of course, require a trifling solatium, while my fee would be the same . . . two thousand dollars.'

'I don't care which it is,' said Kate, 'so long as I can have the Italian flag flying when the British consul comes to deport me.'

'On the whole, Miss Marlowe, I prefer marriage, if a suitable bridegroom can be found. There is public opinion to be considered, you know, and the Italian Consul might find it difficult to justify naturalizing you. Whereas marriage is another thing.

To look at you, Miss Marlowe, is to justify wishing to marry you. In fact, as the bridegroom, if we find one, will be taking a long sea voyage immediately after the ceremony, I would be most happy to deputize for him. In which event, I would be prepared to reconsider my fee . . .'

'Thank you, Commendatore,' said Kate, 'but I would prefer to pay your fee in cash.'

'Shall we say five hundred dollars for the bridegroom, Miss Marlowe? That will include some suitable clothes, of course, and the cost of having him cleaned and made presentable. You may leave the details to me . . . and there is the matter, too, of the Consul's fee. One thousand dollars will cover that . . .'

Aldo hated The Acropolis, hated and feared Toni and Mary Simonides, but he always came back. He had made four or five round trips between Genoa and the Far East since the unforgettable time when he had seen the vision of the gloriously beautiful girl with the blazing halo on her head. He had never been quite sure whether it had been some holy vision, hallucination or reality, but the hope that he might see it again was the only reason he ever came back to The Acropolis, its loathsome company and near-lethal whisky.

Every time Aldo came back his first question was: Has *she* been here again?

'Sure, Aldo, she bin here two three times,' Toni would tell him. 'Always she ask if Aldo bin here, an' I tell her she just miss' you. "Give Aldo my kind regards," she tell me. "Aldo is fine man, so handsome."'

One day when Aldo was drinking his third whisky – he was a glutton for punishment – Mary Simonides, who had just come in the door, took the glass from him and emptied the contents on to the floor. 'All right, Aldo,' she said in her most ingratiating way, 'I'll give you some good whisky in a few minutes . . . all you can drink. But I don't want you to fall flat on your face just yet, not until I've asked you a few questions anyway. You married, Aldo?'

'I was marry once, but my wife she die. Why you ask?'

'D'you remember the girl with the shining red hair, Aldo? The one you saw at the bar here maybe two years ago?'

'Sure I remember her. I dream about her. She is most beautiful girl I ever see.'

Mary poured him some real whisky as a bracer for what was coming. Not good whisky, of course, but not actively lethal. Aldo threw it down in one gulp. 'How would you like to marry her, Aldo?'

'Don' make game wit' me, Mary. Beautiful girl like that never marry dirty coal-passer like me . . .'

'Just the same, Aldo, if you want to marry that girl, I fix it. Not only that . . . you get a hundred dollars cash money to marry her. How do you like that?'

'It is not true,' said Aldo brokenly. 'You make game of me.'

Such things did not happen to a poor Italian coal-passer and Aldo knew it, but somewhere deep down inside him, as there is in every man who is not ready to die, there lived a tiny spark of hope that life would change and be kinder. All Aldo had known to date had been poverty, misery, brutality and, what was even worse, callous neglect. Nobody cared a curse what became of him. Relations fawned on him at the end of a long voyage for what they could get out of him. Waterfront bars drugged him with bad liquor and stole what he had left. Policemen of all nations hit him with truncheons or, if in amiable mood, kicked him. Whores smiled at him while, with expert fingers, they rifled his pockets. The last pleasant thing which had happened to him had been the vision of the girl, saint, angel . . . he did not care which . . . who had appeared to him in the same foul, stinking, evil room, and the memory of it had given him the will and the strength to go on.

The Far Eastern run was, for a coal-passer, the worst in the world, more than two-thirds of it in the tropics, with temperatures below running up to nearly 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Often, especially in the Red Sea, Aldo had collapsed in the stokehold. His body bore many scars from contact with the steel ash-hoist in which they had sent him up to be revived in the blessed fresh

air above. Aldo was too devout a man to commit suicide, or he would have ended it all long ago.

Now, just to see that glorious vision again made it all seem worth while. This tale of marriage was, of course, a lie. So, certainly, was that of the hundred dollars. But Aldo clung to the hope that he would see the vision just once more.

Aldo was standing at the entrance to the Italian Consulate in the Bubbling Well Road when the carriage arrived. Nothing could remove the coal-dust from his hands and neck, but otherwise he was clean and sober, clad in a dark suit with a freshly laundered shirt. Even now, with one hundred dollars in his pocket—he had signed for five hundred, of course—he was not sure how much of this was reality and how much a dream.

When Aldo saw Kate emerge from the carriage, his heart gave a great thump as though he had been kicked there. With eyes downcast, he bowed. It was too much.

‘Well,’ said Belle Darling, gasping with the effort of following ‘there’s your Wop bridegroom, scrubbed from head to foot and sober. It looks better, I always say, if the bridegroom can stand.’

‘Do not forget, Belle,’ said Commendatore Moschetti, drawing himself up to his full five feet two inches, ‘that I also am an Italian and I do not like being called a Wop.’

‘Then don’t act like one!’ snapped Belle, who used the little man but did not like him.

Good humour was restored all round when Kate said: ‘Anyway, Belle, nobody can deny that you make a lovely bridesmaid.’

Belle’s guffaw was so loud that two functionaries of the Italian Consulate, who had been quarrelling over the division of the four hundred dollars filched from Aldo, forgot their differences. Like Aldo, they were not sure that Kate’s loveliness was real.

As the wedding party filed into the consul’s office, Kate looked at Aldo for the first time, recognizing him instantly as the one man in all Shanghai who had risen to her defence. She smiled

at him and, in token that she remembered, hooked her finger through an opening in her blouse to let him catch a glimpse of the gold medallion and chain which he had given her. Aldo had forgotten having given it, assuming that, like everything of value he had ever possessed, it had been stolen from him. Its reappearance now smacked of the miraculous.

Aldo almost burst with pride and during the brief ceremony was too emotionally upset to speak, except for the bare responses.

'I will arrange for him to be put aboard his ship immediately,' said the lawyer. 'It is no good giving the man any wrong ideas.'

'At what time does your ship sail?' asked Kate in laborious schoolgirl Italian.

'At midnight tonight,' replied Aldo. 'I go now.' He bowed and, taking her gloved hand, kissed it with the utmost respect. 'My prayer for you is long life and happiness.'

'No, don't go,' said Kate impulsively. 'I insist that you come to the wedding breakfast. You will come?'—she glanced at the marriage certificate clutched in her right hand—'Please, you will come . . . Signor Ferrari?'

'Put the Wop on his ship, kick his ass and forget him!' urged Belle.

'It is a mistake, Miss Marlowe,' said Commendatore Moschetti. 'It could lead to bad trouble . . . blackmail . . . anything.'

'I don't think so,' said Kate. 'He and I have met before and I do not forget that he is the only . . . gentleman I have met in Shanghai. I do not wish to forget. I will never forget!'

This was all too cryptic for the others, but they let it pass. Kate, with Aldo beside her, sat facing Belle Darling and the lawyer, as they drove out to the French Concession and the *Villa Eglantine*, in silence, each of them with thoughts so far apart that they might have been on another planet. Kate was overwhelmed by the sordidness of the farce just enacted, while Aldo wove little fantasies about this lovely girl who, against all the probabilities, was real. Commendatore Moschetti, despite his rebuff, was weaving a spider's web in which, maybe, he could ensnare Kate. Belle was the paradox. She was having hard work restraining her tears for she was, despite her terrifying exterior—and the

words are hers—'just a great fat, sentimental slob at heart'.

At table Kate put Aldo in the place John Ingleby had always occupied and was astonished to see that he ate and drank delicately. During the meal there was not much conversation, for there was a sense of restraint over the party. Kate felt an amazing community of thought with this man whom, in all likelihood, she would never see again, but whom the law called her husband. Life had been unkind to Aldo Ferrari and Kate wished there were something she could do for him. There was only one thing, she decided, but dismissed the thought almost as it crossed her mind. Aldo must have read her thoughts because he looked squarely at her, as though trying to fix everything about her in memory, and before he dropped his gaze Kate saw him slowly shake his head. He had understood.

Soon after rising from the table, the party broke up. Belle Darling went to her house beside the Soochow Creek, while Commendatore Moschetti took Aldo back to his ship. After a formal, almost courtly, leavetaking, Aldo smiled, stood proudly erect, and climbed into the carriage. When it drove away, he did not turn his head.

There was a small pile of unopened letters on Kate's desk in her bedroom, one bearing an Australian postmark, which had been sent on from the bank. It was from a firm of solicitors in Sydney, to whom Kate had written six months previously in an effort to locate Colin, of whom the last she had heard was that he had sailed from Singapore to Sydney. Colin, the solicitors reported, was working as barman in an unsavoury waterside pub in Sydney, and for over a year had been living openly with a woman of ill repute. Would Kate kindly let them have instructions. She sat down immediately to write a letter in reply, requesting them to obtain evidence of adultery to enable her to institute divorce proceedings at the earliest possible moment. They might expect her in Sydney by an early sailing. She signed the letter as Kate Wilder.

Marlowe, Wilder and now Ferrari. Names signified so little. Overcome by a sense of having failed at everything, with her life in pieces around her, Kate flung herself on the bed—the bed

in which, so Shanghai believed, there had been nameless orgies – and gave herself over to tears.

There had been no publicity about Kate's bigamous marriage to Aldo Ferrari. This had been at her urgent request, so that when a British consular official arrived at the *Villa Eglantine* armed with full power to seize Kate's person by force if necessary, he received a rude shock. 'It will be far better all round, Miss Marlowe,' he said, loathing the job, 'better for you, I mean, if you come with me quietly. We have the powers, you know, and the Consul-General wishes me to tell you that, however reluctantly, we shall use them. This document, if you care to read it, makes everything quite clear.'

'Before you get out of my house,' said Kate coldly, 'there is a document you would do well to read . . . before you land in serious trouble.'

Framed in the entrance hall was a letter stating that Signora Ferrari, wife of Aldo Ferrari, was an Italian subject and, as such, entitled to the protection of the Royal Italian Consulate.

'Now get out and stay out!' said Kate.

For a few moments the official paused, wondering whether he should not ignore the document flaunted before him. Then, remembering that other jurisdictional disputes had caused trouble out of all proportion to their importance, he acknowledged defeat by leaving the premises. This was, he decided, a chestnut far too hot for a junior official to touch.

On the day after this petty victory Kate sent paid notices of her marriage to the English-language newspapers in Shanghai. It ranked in her mind as a declaration of war.

Kate remained in Shanghai for several weeks, long enough to impress upon the public mind the fact that she had defied the British Consul-General with impunity. During this period, she appeared on the race-course twice and was frequently to be seen driving up the Nanking Road towards the quiet residential

districts developing in the western part of the city. It was a childish gesture, perhaps, but for Kate herself it was a landmark: it was a landmark for it was her first victory against the hostile forces which had ringed her round ever since she had come to Shanghai.

Travelling under her maiden name of Marlowe, Kate slipped away early one morning in a Dutch ship bound for Singapore. In those days passports were not needed, except for visiting Russia and Turkey, where tyrants feared more than anything the clean winds of freedom blowing round the world. The Italians would have given her a passport had she asked for it, but it would have been too raw, she decided, and too risky, to arrive in Australia under the name of Ferrari. It was important, as Kate saw things, to dissolve her legal marriage to Colin Wilder on the off chance that she might wish to remarry legally. The marriage to Aldo Ferrari, of course, had no validity, being merely a convenience.

Commendatore Moschetti had assured Kate that when and if the marriage to Ferrari became inconvenient, he could arrange for its dissolution by the simple expedient of having all documentary record of it destroyed. It would cost money, of course, but it would be cheaper and more likely to be effective than trying to serve divorce papers on a homeless coal-passer, even supposing that any other courts but the Italian—where divorce was next door to impossible—would have jurisdiction.

Kate stayed at a quiet waterfront hotel outside the centre of Sydney, an expensive establishment patronized by the 'squatocracy'. Here she lived as quietly as possible. Her looks, as they were bound to, attracted attention, but although people stared at her, there was none of the implacable hostility by which she had seemed hemmed in since Ingleby's death.

The Pitt Street solicitors assured Kate that the evidence against her husband was crystal clear and that as the case was not being defended, the hearing would be little more than a formality.

Her attendance at court was advisable, but the chances were that her evidence would not be needed.

And so it turned out. After a hearing lasting barely fifteen minutes, Kate was granted a decree *nisi*, to be made absolute six months later unless during that period anything transpired to cause the court to reverse its decision.

Colin Wilder, who had slipped a few rungs on the social ladder, had no wish to attend the court proceedings, partly for lack of decent clothes, which had been seized by a lodging house for an unpaid bill. He called himself a barman, but was in fact little more than a potboy in a pub frequented by the roughest elements in the city which, over fifty years ago, were very rough indeed in Sydney.

By good fortune the hearing of the divorce action coincided with his day off so, largely from curiosity to see Kate again, he spent the half-hour before the hearing lurking inconspicuously outside the law courts.

As he saw Kate descend from the cab, accompanied by her solicitor, Colin felt his heart miss a beat or two. He had always known she was beautiful, of course, but it had been the beauty of immaturity. The Kate he had left to her fate in Singapore had been a girl, shy and unsure of herself, but the woman stepping out of the cab had poise, maturity and a beauty even more radiant for having shed its puppy qualities. This was a real woman, a raving beauty who would draw attention anywhere in the world.

Kate was dressed in a well-tailored coat and skirt which, even to Colin's bleary eyes, looked expensive. In fact, although she wore no jewels, everything about her looked expensive, especially the new assurance which she wore so convincingly. Nobody knew better than he how hard it was to look assured and confident with empty pockets.

What, he asked himself, had happened to little Kate during the time since they had last seen each other? Had she by chance inherited a lot of money from her father, although pretending at the time of his death that he had nothing? Was that it? The artful little bitch!

The only other way in which Kate could have acquired a lot

of money was painfully obvious: there was a man in her life. With her looks it would have been remarkable if there had not been a man somewhere in the background. Before she vanished altogether from his life, Kate, he decided, would bear a little quiet investigation.

When she emerged from the law courts after the hearing, it was plain from her manner and that of the solicitor that the divorce had been granted. They parted outside the main entrance, setting out in opposite directions. At a near-by cab rank, Colin heard Kate give the address of her hotel to the driver. Lacking the money to follow by cab, he set out on foot.

On the way, glad of the chance to rest, Colin stopped at a barber's shop for a shave, knowing that he had no chance of getting inside the door of Kate's hotel as he was. Even shaven, it was going to be difficult.

By chance Kate and Colin came face to face in the grounds of the hotel. Kate was occupying a small ground-floor suite consisting of bedroom, bathroom and living-room. It seemed best, therefore, to see him there rather than in one of the public rooms, where his shabbiness would have been conspicuous.

'Congratulations on getting rid of me, Katie!' Colin said with a wry grin. 'How about sending for something to drink so that we can toast it!'

Without a word in reply, Kate rang the bell, telling the boy who answered it to bring a bottle of whisky, some soda and two glasses. Filling two glasses, Kate raised hers: 'Here's to the day when you find yourself in the gutter, where you belong, Colin! You're not far away from it now, I can see. Drink your drink and get out. Please God I will never see you again.'

'You're looking as lovely as ever, Katie. Prosperous, too. A suite like this costs real money. Must have cost real money to come to Australia from wherever you've come from, to hire lawyers to find me and watch me. Seems like I did you a good turn by leaving you. May I help myself to another?'

'Please do,' was the cool reply. 'You always did like the taste of drink that somebody else was paying for.'

'You've changed, Katie,' said Colin thoughtfully. 'There's a

hint of acid about you now. Watch out that you don't turn too sour. It wouldn't suit your colouring.'

'If you've said everything you came to say,' said Kate, looking him up and down insultingly, from his dirty shirt to his scuffed shoes, 'will you please go . . . and don't come back. Take the whisky with you . . . it always was your true love. If you are still here when I come back, she said, going into the bedroom and closing the door, 'I shall ring the bell and have you thrown out.'

'The bitch means it, too,' he muttered, putting the whisky bottle into his pocket preparatory to leaving. But looking around the room, he saw that a trunk ready packed for departure bore the label of the Astor House Hotel, Shanghai. A quick scrutiny of the other labels visible told him that only two months or so previously she had sailed from Shanghai. So far the information had no significance, but he filed it away for further thought.

When Kate returned to the room, Colin had gone.

Kate left Sydney by a ship going directly to Hongkong, where there was an enforced wait of five days for a connecting ship to Shanghai. She was about to go for a drive in the cool of the evening of her last day in Hongkong when a familiar voice, which she could not place at first, said: 'Good evening, Miss Marlowe. Only two nights ago I dreamed that you were here.'

Kate turned in the direction of the voice to see an old man, clad little better than the beggars, shuffling towards her. He seemed pitifully thin and emaciated. 'Who are you?' she asked.

'It is not surprising that you do not recognize me,' he said. 'I am John, formerly butler to Miss Gracie on Lyndhurst Terrace.'

'Yes, I remember you well, John. But you have changed. Come with me in the carriage and tell me everything.'

'No, Miss Marlowe, I cannot do that. It would not be proper. Even if I have known misfortune, I still know my place.'

'Don't waste time arguing,' said Kate impatiently, 'or you will attract far more attention than by doing what I say. Why did you leave Miss Gracie?'

‘The Government deported her a year ago,’ replied John, getting into the carriage reluctantly and sitting as far as possible from Kate. ‘A man was drugged and robbed there. That was the finish. The house is closed. Since then I have had no employment. Miss Gracie gave me a reference, but it is not of great value in Hongkong.’

It was a simple story, simply told, without an unnecessary word. Kate heard it in silence. She remembered that this man had been kind and courteous and at some risk to himself, for in all probability Gracie would not have forgiven him for taking a guest out of her house as he had done.

It was now a part of Kate’s religion not to forget enemies: if she were to justify the attitude, it was even more important not to forget friends. ‘Come to Shanghai, John,’ she said, ‘and I will find employment for you.’

‘Thank you, Miss Marlowe, but I have a wife and a young son. I cannot abandon them.’

‘I wouldn’t ask you to. Bring them, too. Here is some money,’ Kate said, opening her purse, ‘and my address in Shanghai. I go there tomorrow.’

Eighteen

Pinned together in the Memory Box were the New South Wales decree of divorce from Colin Wilder and the certificate of marriage to Aldo Ferrari, the latter dated nine months before the former. It was a way of serving notice on the world that Kate made her own laws.

KATE'S RETURN to Shanghai was as unobtrusive as her departure, for with the exception of her servants, Belle Darling and Mr Borbridge at the bank, nobody knew that she had gone away. The unpalatable truth was that once the *furor* over Ingleby's death had died away, nobody was particularly interested in Singapore Kate, anyway, nobody but Gordon Maitland who, observing lights at the *Villa Eglantine* one evening—it was not far from the French Club—rang the doorbell.

'Why, Kate, why,' he asked, greetings over, 'were you such a fool as to come back? What does Shanghai hold for you . . . what can it ever hold for you but ugly memories?'

'Do you know, Gordon, I've been asking myself that same question and I'm not sure I know the answer. I think . . . I'm not sure . . . that if those ridiculous people at the British Consulate hadn't tried to run me out, I would have gone and never come back. They wouldn't lift a finger to help me when I needed help desperately, so I most certainly won't allow them to dictate to me now that I don't need them. They say that an English girl who becomes a whore here—and I haven't done that yet—damages British prestige. Well, they should have thought of that a long time ago . . .'

'But why go and marry some lousy little Italian?'

'I didn't have much choice. Besides he wasn't a "lousy little Italian", as you put it. He was a poor half-starved, brutalized coal-passer, who never had a chance in life, but he was also a kind, gallant little man . . . the only man of any race in Shanghai

. . . no, in the whole of the Far East, who ever showed me a spark of real chivalry. Yes, Gordon, and that includes you. You had no more chivalry than a . . . a billygoat. All you wanted was to get me safely tucked up in a double bed, wasn't it?

'Of course, Kate. I still do for that matter. But I would have married you . . . gladly.'

'It's safe enough to say that to Signora Ferrari, Gordon, but after the Ingleby scandal you didn't say it to Kate Marlowe. Why? Doesn't the question answer itself? Furthermore, Gordon, when you came back from that trip to Hankow and saw me with Ingleby at The Wheel, he and I were on "Mr Ingleby" and "Miss Marlowe" terms. But like everyone else, you were prepared to believe the worst of me . . .'

'How was I to know that old Mrs Whatsername . . . the woman you worked for . . . had kept my letters and telegrams from you? Incidentally, why did she? I've never understood that part.'

'Because John Ingleby got at her while we were in Hong-kong, before we even reached Shanghai. Like you, John Ingleby was interested only in my beautiful body, and he promised old Rosie Jenkins enough to retire on if he got it . . .'

'I hope he rots in hell,' said Gordon savagely, 'and I'm glad I pushed his front teeth in first . . . the bastard!'

'But you didn't stop to think what pushing his front teeth in would do to my reputation, did you, Gordon? So long as you were able to work off your ill humour by behaving like a wild beast, dear little Kate, the woman you said you loved . . . remember? . . . she didn't matter. John Ingleby's rotting safely in hell, as you say. But do you think I'm much better off? Or even as well off?'

'All right, Kate, say what you have to say. Get it off your chest if it makes you feel better. I admit freely that I behaved like a fool and a cad, but I was a jealous man, which didn't help my judgment. And none of this will help either of us.'

'Nothing will help either of us, Gordon. Can't you, or won't you understand? Even supposing I were to get rid of my husband . . . where would that leave us? I don't want you to wake

up in the mornings, look at me and have a shadow cross your eyes when you remember, as you would, that John Ingleby once lay where you were lying. Then you'd remember something worse, Gordon. You'd remember that it need never have happened . . . that it had once lain in your power to prevent it and that because of a fit of drunken jealous rage you believed I was a whore and behaved accordingly.

'All right, I am on the way to being a whore and I hope you will like the finished product. But don't waste time thinking that there's some kind of magic formula like abracadabra which turns a whore back into a virtuous woman. There isn't, Gordon. Once a whore, always a whore, until one gets too old and ugly to attract customers. Then, in the time that's left, I suppose, one mourns the passing of "the good old days".'

Kate's vehemence seemed to fill the house until there was no room for anything else. After a long silence, Gordon said: 'A time may come when you need a friend, Kate. When that time comes, I won't fail you . . . not again. You can count on me always . . . now that it's too late. Thanks to Ingleby, directly and indirectly, I'm making money. It's yours whenever you need it. It's funny how things work out, isn't it? The day after I pushed Ingleby's front teeth in, I threw his business back in his face . . . before he had time to take it away. People got to know that and they argued that Gordon Maitland must be honest, or he wouldn't have done that to his best client.

'So remember, Kate, I have money if you need it.'

'My dear Gordon,' said Kate lightly, 'you are not very flattering. I look in the mirror and it tells me that it will be a long time before I need money. I am, although you don't realize it, a very expensive girl. I hope you'll take an interest in my career. After all, it was you who gave me my start . . .'

Gordon had had all he could take. Hot tears of shame were blinding him when he ran out of the house. Why, Kate asked herself when he was gone, did she feel impelled to show herself in the worst possible light? Was it because Shanghai had assumed the worse about her ever since she arrived? Or was it just bitterness that Gordon, of whom she had been entitled to

expect better things, had conformed to the general pattern?

These were part of the answer, but only part. Kate knew that she could not face the unbelief in Gordon's eyes if she were to tell him the cold truth, which was that she had never been John Ingleby's mistress. The lie was so much more credible than the truth.

Hearing by the grapevine that Kate was back in Shanghai, Belle Darling came to call. A curious kind of understanding had sprung up between these two women, curious because of the immense gulf which divided them. They did not understand each other. That went without saying. But each had pierced a chink in the other's armour. Belle knew that the delicately nurtured Kate, with her pleasing, almost childish manners and gentle speech, was infinitely harder and tougher of fibre than she appeared to be. From much experience of whores, Belle was fearful that Kate was bottling up her emotions and that one day she would go too far the other way. Kate—and the older woman knew it—saw through Belle's bullying and blustering to the insecurity below it. Despite the manners of a warthog, the grace of a hippopotamus and the morals of an alley cat, these were only a façade behind which this gross woman hid her fears.

John, who had travelled to Shanghai by the same ship as Kate, leaving his wife and son to follow, arrived with a tray of assorted drinks. 'If madam has a guest for dinner,' he said with great dignity, 'I will instruct the cook accordingly.'

'Damned if I ever heard a Chink talk like that!' said Belle. 'Where did he learn it?'

With the total disregard for Chinese sensibilities which was customary, Belle said this in John's hearing. He was used to being treated like a piece of furniture.

'John was once butler to the Governor of Hongkong,' replied Kate with quiet reproof.

'Musta bin before my time!' said Belle without cracking a smile.

John, who was familiar with the top and the bottom of the

social ladder, recognized Belle at once for exactly what she was and was profoundly shocked. He felt a real grief that Kate should not only associate with such a woman, but have her under her roof. It was with a sense of relief that he heard Kate say: 'Please tell the cook that I shall be alone for dinner.'

Belle Darling's prime purpose in coming to see Kate was frankly commercial. 'I've got some rich guys lined up for you, Kate. When are you comin' to work? No good bein' shy and keepin' it in mothballs, y'know. Get out and around . . . let the customers take a look at you once in a while . . . an' sell it while it's a seller's market.'

'I wish I could paint, Belle, because I'd love to paint you as a sweet little cupid with a bow and arrow . . .'

'Honey,' said Belle in shocked tones, ignoring Kate's witicism, 'you're not givin' it away, are you?'

'No, Belle, I promise you, I haven't sunk to that!'

Nineteen

The Memory Box contains many evidences of Kate's exultant glee as her fortune increases. Across the first list of investments of which there is any record, she wrote: 'This is just a beginning!'

MR CHARLES BORBRIDGE, head of the Anglo-Chinese and Far Eastern Bank, was a man with few illusions. Thirty-two of his fifty-two years had been spent faithfully in the service of Mammon. Nor is this said disparagingly. He was a man of scrupulous honesty and, considering his respect for money, amounting almost to veneration, surprisingly lacking in personal greed. Like all bankers, he did not waste time in abstractions where money was concerned. Money was money, whether inherited, made by usury, gambling, or from the proceeds of thrift and industry. So long as he could be acquitted of all guilty knowledge, he did not really care how it was made. Indeed, he preferred actively not to know unless there were some useful purpose to be served by knowing.

When Mr Borbridge received a letter from Miss Kate Marlowe, asking him to set a convenient time for an interview, he had already forgotten the circumstances in which the account had been opened, or it would be more accurate to say that he remembered the lovely girl who had been kept waiting in line, but did not associate her with the name on the letter. His detachment went even further than this. In his private capacity as a prominent British resident of Shanghai, he knew of and deplored 'the notorious Kate Marlowe'. But this could not in the smallest degree influence his judgment as a banker.

Half an hour before the time set for the interview with Miss Marlowe, there appeared on Mr Borbridge's desk a few of the salient details about the account, the chief of which was that at the previous day's close of business the amount standing to her credit was \$88,411.23 . . . Mexican, of course, but still a sub-

stantial sum and one entitling Miss Marlowe to the full facilities and courtesies of the Anglo-Chinese and Far Eastern Bank, quite regardless of how the money had been made. To have taken any other attitude in Mr Borbridge's view would have been heresy and a betrayal of the gods to whom he had bent the knee for three-fifths of his life.

'I remember our first meeting now, Miss Marlowe,' he said as Kate was ushered into his private office, 'but until you came into the room, you were just a name in a ledger. What can I do for you?'

'I need advice about investing money, Mr Borbridge. I am very ignorant and, if you can spare the time, I would be grateful for your help. You see,' Kate went on, 'I know what it is to be quite destitute and . . . well, I have a terrible fear of ever being poor again. I hope you understand.'

'You are very wise, Miss Marlowe. I will go into the matter and let you have our recommendations in writing.'

'I am quite willing to sign a paper giving you full authority to invest the money in any way you please . . .'

'No, Miss Marlowe, that wouldn't do at all. You must be interested and share the responsibility. You will hear from me.'

Commendatore Moschetti was waiting at the *Villa Eglantine* when Kate returned. He had bad news and seemed to be rather pleased to be the bearer of it. 'A somewhat delicate situation has arisen,' he began. 'There is, as you may know, an influential group of busybodies who call themselves the Shanghai Council for Public Morality and Decency. Among the prominent members is Mrs Ingleby, widow of the late Mr John Ingleby.'

He paused to let the name sink in.

'It has been suggested to the Italian Minister in Peking,' he went on, 'that the Consul in Shanghai committed an unfriendly act . . . unfriendly to the British authorities, of course, in the matter of your marriage to Aldo Ferrari. The view in Peking seems to be that neither you, nor your husband, is of sufficient importance to warrant what might, if the validity of your marriage were seriously challenged, become a diplomatic incident.'

'And what then?' asked Kate.

'My considered advice to you,' said the lawyer, 'is that you . . . we should take steps to ensure that the Italian Legation regards your case in a favourable light.'

'I see,' said Kate in a tight voice. 'It comes down to a case of how much. Well, how much? I suppose it costs more to bribe a Minister than a Consul.'

'To be frank with you, Miss Marlowe, that is my experience,' said the lawyer judicially. 'No specific sum has been mentioned, of course, but I would say that for ten thousand dollars we could regard the incident as closed.'

'It's too much,' said Kate firmly. 'If I pay ten thousand dollars now, there will another demand before long. No, I won't pay. But I promise you one thing, which is that if Mrs Ingleby really is the power behind this organization with a long name, she won't be for long. What's more, I'll make Mrs Ingleby pay the ten thousand to your people in Peking . . .'

'Your people, too, Signora Ferrari. Don't forget that you are an Italian.'

' . . . provided that I can get some kind of assurance that the payment is final.'

'And how do you propose to make Mrs Ingleby do this?' asked the lawyer, looking at Kate with a new respect.

'Never mind how, Commendatore! Just take my word for it that she will drop the whole thing like a hot brick.'

'Yes, I believe you,' he said looking at Kate wonderingly. 'How is it that you, looking like a schoolgirl, know so much?'

'I don't know much,' said Kate sadly, 'but I'm learning fast.'

Mrs Ingleby did not say anything when Kate's name was announced to her. She needed time to think. 'All right,' she said at length, 'I will see her.'

There was nothing whatever to be read in Kate's face and bearing when she was shown into the Ingleby drawing-room where, over the fireplace, hung a portrait in oils of John Ingleby. Kate paused for a second or so to look at it appraisingly. Then, quite at ease, she turned to his widow.

'You are wasting your time, young woman,' the other said,

'and I would have credited you with more sense than to come here . . . of all places, to the home you wrecked. Are you such a fool as to suppose that I would listen to your pleas? Get out of Shanghai, young woman. Leave the China Coast and stay away, because there is nothing here for you but trouble. Go to Buenos Aires. There, I am told, there is a market for women of your kind—'

She stopped short, hardly able to believe the evidence of her eyes and ears: Kate was laughing.

'You shameless hussy!'

'I thought it was only in books that there were shameless hussies!' laughed Kate. 'But excuse me, I interrupted you.'

'Why did you come here? What do you want?'

'I want *nothing*, Mrs Ingleby. But I came here to warn you to leave me alone, because if you interfere with me any further, I'm afraid the consequences . . . to you will be very unpleasant. In this envelope—read it at your leisure—is a list of eight men with whom you slept when you were in Europe . . . names, dates, places . . . everything. The originals, I need hardly tell you, are in a safe place. One of the men, I see, was a waiter, and it is all supported by affidavits from inquiry agents and hotel servants. I don't want to use this, Mrs Ingleby, and I wouldn't dream of doing so . . . except in self-defence. But I promise you that if you or your silly little society make any more trouble for me, I will have copies made of these documents and circulate them to every English-speaking person in Shanghai.'

'Where did you get this?' asked Edith Ingleby in a whisper, her face ashy grey.

'Your husband had you watched all the time you were in Europe . . . and, incidentally, for months in China before you left. There is a separate sheet there for the names of your Shanghai lovers. Your husband was preparing to divorce you, and would have done so if he had lived.'

'To marry *you*?'

'Good heavens, no! Just to get rid of you, Mrs Ingleby.'

The latter seemed to have difficulty with her breathing. She fought for several minutes to control herself, while Kate stood

calmly looking at her. At length Mrs Ingleby was able to speak. 'How much,' she asked, 'do you want for the originals of these documents?'

'They are not for sale, Mrs Ingleby. I am not a blackmailer. Just a woman who is prepared to go to any lengths . . . any lengths, do you understand, to defend herself. You go on trying to hound me out of Shanghai and I will guarantee to hound you out . . . yes, and ruin whatever reputation you may still have. Leave me alone and, I assure you, I shall be delighted to forget that you ever existed.'

Kate turned to leave and as she did so her gaze rested again on the portrait of John Ingleby.

'Were you in love with him?' asked Edith Ingleby in a cracked voice.

'No, of course not!' replied Kate contemptuously. 'Like you, all I was interested in was his money!'

When Kate swept out of the Ingleby house in triumph, there was a bitter taste in her mouth as she realized what Shanghai had done to her. She looked about her wonderingly, questingly, as the rickshaw-puller took her home through the quiet residential area either side of the Bubbling Well Road between the race-course and the Bubbling Well itself. It all wore the respectable, almost demure, look of an English cathedral town, or one of the better class residential suburbs of London. The houses and gardens were aggressively English in the best lace curtain, lobelia and geranium tradition. Except for an occasional Chinese face—and surprisingly few of these—there was nothing to suggest China.

The road home skirted the extreme western limits of the International Settlement. The road itself was foreign, but the fields beyond it Chinese. By the side of the road lay the body of an elderly Chinese beside whom, keeping watch like a dog, was a small boy, staring at nothing in dry-eyed grief. Kate called to the rickshaw-puller to stop, but he shook his head, making it clear that he did not want to be involved in the tragedy. A hundred yards farther on, at Kate's insistence, the man stopped, dropping the shafts for Kate to alight. She returned on foot and,

putting her hand on the man's heart, ascertained that it was still beating.

It was an hour before Kate could persuade the European sergeant on duty at the police station to send anyone. 'What's the use?' the man asked. 'If he has relations, they'll send for him.'

'And if he has no relations?'

'He'll die and someone will remove the body, I suppose.'

'Like garbage, is that it?'

'You said it, Miss, I didn't,' said the sergeant, turning away.

That was Shanghai. People averted their heads from a man dying by the roadside, but stirred themselves to move his body when it threatened to become a nuisance.

When Kate returned, the small boy was still staring at nothing and the old man was dead. Nobody cared. That was what was wrong with Shanghai, Kate was beginning to realize. It was a community dedicated to gross materialism carried to almost unbelievable extremes. There was everything to satisfy the grosser appetites and nothing to satisfy the mind. Nobody seemed interested in Art, but everyone in Sport. The only real standard was Money. The hard and the strong survived. 'All right,' said Kate aloud to the bewilderment of the rickshaw-puller and the passers-by, throwing out a challenge into the void, 'I'm strong and I'm learning to be hard!'

Commendatore Moschetti winced as Kate entered his office, for there was a look in her eye which he did not like. He deplored Anglo-Saxon bluntness, which to his twisted mind was nearly always another word for rudeness. He was by instinct polite and, if the need had arisen, would have stabbed his victim in the back with a smile.

'I think,' Kate began, 'it's time you and I understood each other. I have dealt with Mrs Ingleby. You will, I assure you, hear nothing more from her . . . anyway, about me. If I used her as a character reference, she would have nothing but praise for me.'

'But how did you do it?' asked the Italian in amazement.

'I put all the facts before Mrs Ingleby,' replied Kate with a mirthless smile, 'and she agrees now that she misjudged me. Facts, of course, are not always enough. It is the way they are presented. But it should not be necessary to tell you, a lawyer, things like that.'

'So?'

'So there's no need to pay anyone ten thousand dollars, is there, Commendatore? And while we are on the subject, I consider that your job is to protect me . . . from everyone. And everyone includes the leeches at the Italian Consulate.'

'I realize how very weak my position is. I realize also that in order to have Italian nationality and protection here, I must go on paying. But don't press too hard, Commendatore. Mrs Ingleby made that mistake. So let us come to an agreement with your consul . . . my consul, if you like . . . for a flat inclusive sum to be paid monthly and to include your fees. Any legal work outside this, of course, I expect to pay for.'

'These matters are extremely delicate, Miss Marlowe,' said the lawyer uncomfortably, 'and, as you say, your position is somewhat vulnerable . . .'

'Listen, Commendatore, I'm not so much in love with the idea of being an Italian as you may think. Italian, you know, isn't the only nationality for sale in Shanghai. Make things difficult for me and you'll see some other flag flying from my flagpole before you can turn round. I'm not fussy. I've proved that, haven't I?'

'I did not say that matters could not be arranged at the Italian Consulate on a . . . mutually satisfactory basis,' he said, looking at Kate with a new respect in his eyes. 'I will see what can be done.'

Twenty

There were pitifully few things in the Memory Box which might be classified as sentimental keepsakes, but one of these was a tiny cocker spaniel, beautifully carved from a piece of jet or black crystal. A name-plate on the collar, legible only with a magnifying glass, declares its name to be 'Jakes'.

IT WAS not until Brentana said she was ready for it that Kate graduated to the 'big' poker game in the private room at The Wheel. Aside from liking Kate, which he did, she was the kind of lovely creature he liked to have around. She dressed the house, as they say in the theatre. Arrestingly beautiful, she attracted men. She antagonized women, of course, but that did not matter, for the women who patronized The Wheel did so chiefly to prevent their husbands from gambling too heavily and were, therefore, a liability.

It was one of Brentana's theories that the rare woman who was a poker player at heart, could outplay most men. Men who might have been great poker players, he believed, often just missed it because of the male weakness for strutting and playing to the gallery.

'You are a good player, Miss Marlowe,' he told her. 'Whether or not you are a great player remains to be seen. Nobody knows that until he is playing for more than he can afford. But to show my confidence in you, I will let you play for the house.'

'What does that mean . . . in money?'

'It means that you get your chips for nothing. When you cash in your chips at the end of the evening, twenty five per cent of the profit is yours. On the other hand, all losses are cumulative until offset by winnings.'

'Thank you, Mr Brentana, but no. I'll play with my own money, or not at all.'

'Good, very good! We will soon know. Remember the golden

rule of poker. Don't try too hard to win, but try all the time not to lose. There is a difference.'

There were six players in the game at the big table when Kate made her *début*, one of them a wealthy Central European Jew, a naturalized American, whose name had been anglicized to Ashpole. Brentana had briefed Kate about the others, warning her particularly of Ashpole, who was a good player and prepared to gamble heavily. It was obvious in the first five minutes that Ashpole was interested in Kate as a woman. That in itself made him a less formidable opponent. In point of fact, Kate liked the man on sight, but went out of her way to show him a cold indifference that was almost insulting. This angered him and, as everyone who plays poker knows, an angry man is at a disadvantage.

With sparks of antagonism flashing between these two, the game degenerated into a duel which, uninteresting to the others, caused them to drop out. Their places were soon taken.

At three in the morning, when the game broke up, Ashpole, off balance and in a vile temper, had lost nearly \$15,000, most of it to Kate.

'You did not play well enough to win such a sum,' said Brentana, wagging a finger in her face. 'You won that because you are a woman. Ashpole does not know that yet, but when he wakes in the morning he will know. Next time you play with him a woman's tricks will be wasted. If you want his money you will have to play poker for it.'

It was beginning to dawn on Kate that the most powerful weapon in her armoury, more potent even than her beauty and desirability, was the effect she had upon men. She disconcerted them. Their feet and hands felt too large when they were talking to her. Even a suave rascal like Moschetti lost his equilibrium so that his smile did not fit quite so well. When John Ingleby, that would-be Casanova, had been fixed in Kate's contemptuous gaze, it had scared him into impotence.

It was while she was trying to understand this power she possessed that Kate met George Kettle. It was at The Wheel and – there were never introductions in the poker-room – they

sat facing each other. The game was dull, the players too much on guard against trickery for free play. It broke up early. 'I'd like to take a whirl at roulette,' said George Kettle to Kate. 'Coming?'

'Yes, I'd like to,' said Kate, feeling young and light-hearted again, something she had not experienced for a long time. She liked George Kettle on sight, particularly his unstudied way of talking and behaving.

'Partners?' he asked, producing a wad of currency.

'Yes, I'll match that, whatever it is,' replied Kate. 'Count it.'

There was \$220 in Kettle's hand. Taking this, Kate added a like sum, buying chips to the value of \$440. These she turned over to Kettle. 'You play,' she said. 'I'll be your mascot.'

In the first decade of the century 'nice' young women (a) did not go alone to gambling hells; (b) did not pick up, or allow themselves to be picked up by, strange men. It followed, therefore, that Kate was not a nice young woman. Which must have been apparent to George Kettle.

There followed a roulette player's dream in which George Kettle could do nothing wrong, for at the end of less than an hour he cashed in chips to the value of over \$20,000, or nearly fifty times the original stake. In front of a congratulatory crowd, they divided the sum equally and went into the dining-room for some supper, each of them having missed dinner.

George Kettle, it transpired over Brentana's sumptuous food, was representing a Chicago patent medicine firm, which hoped to market a cure-all in China. 'Day after tomorrow,' he said, 'I'm going up-river to appoint agents in the Yangtze cities. Care to come?'

'All right, why not?' replied Kate gaily. 'All I've seen of China is Shanghai. My name, by the way, is Kate . . . Kate Marlowe.'

'What do you do here?' he asked with un-European directness.

'If you inquire around,' replied Kate, 'you'll learn that I'm a bad woman, dangerous and to be avoided and, depending on what kind of a man you are and who tells you, you may even believe it.'

'Are you a bad, dangerous woman?'

'As bad as I have to be, like most people,' replied Kate with a smile that meant anything at all, 'and dangerous only to myself. But why believe anyone . . . even me? Find out for yourself.'

'All right, my lovely Kate, I'll do just that.'

The last thing Shanghai would have believed about Kate was the truth, that sexually speaking she was as green as grass. The wild stories about her were so much more amusing and satisfying than prosaic facts. Technically, she could not claim to be a virgin, but she was the next best thing, except that virginity is such a definite state admitting of no degrees. You are or you are not.

Kate's initiation had been not so much brutal as perfunctory. There were no delights implicit in the word 'sex'. Not being a fool, she realized that something had been wanting in her sex relationship with Colin Wilder. Otherwise, it stood to reason, there would not be so much of the world's energies and attentions directed to the sexual act. Otherwise, John Ingleby would not have settled a fortune on her and killed himself by an overdose of an aphrodisiac in the vain hope of getting value for his money. Even women, Kate was persuaded, like it. If that were so, why not Kate, too?

It was in some such spirit as this that Kate agreed so lightly to join George Kettle on his trip up-river. It was no romantic love, of course, but she liked the man, found him gay and amusing and believed that with him sex might be pleasant, even exciting. This young American might not be flattered to know that he was being used as a guinea-pig, and what he did not know would not hurt him. But it was important for a woman who had decided to become a whore to know something about sex for fun before she graduated to sex for money.

The ship for Hankow sailed in the early evening. Kate and George Kettle, who had communicating cabins, were aboard by six o'clock and in bed together before dinner, which they had sent in on a tray. Most of the remainder of the three-day voyage was likewise spent in bed. We cannot re-live it vicariously for

them, but speaking of it nearly fifty years later, Kate said: 'I could have wished he were a little less ardent, but I enjoyed it, and while he was doing business in Hankow, I caught up with my sleep. It told me, don't you see, that I had the right temperament for what I planned to be. As we say today, I could take sex, or leave it, without actively disliking it, or being a slave to my senses. It meant that in my relations with men I would, in the real sense of the word, be their mistress, while they would be my slaves.'

It was five weeks before these two returned to Shanghai, by which time they were the best of friends. There was neither sentiment nor money involved and when George Kettle returned to the States, as he planned to do shortly thereafter, they would part with pleasant regret but no recriminations. In the time that remained, they were seen everywhere together, dining, racing, dancing and, more important than any of these, laughing.

George had some kind of understanding with a girl back home, just short of an official engagement. Before marrying her, he told Kate, he would tell the girl about this fling on the China Coast and would hope for her tolerance.

On the trip back to San Francisco, it was found on the morning of arrival in Yokohama that George Kettle was not in his room. A search satisfied the ship's officers that he was not aboard. He had vanished during the night, presumably, since there was nowhere else to go, overboard.

The story was cabled back to Shanghai briefly, since the fatality had occurred to a Shanghai passenger. George Kettle's association with Kate was widely known, since there had been from first to last no concealment. Ugly tongues did the rest. They remembered the death of John Ingleby.

Kate was well launched on a new career as a *femme fatale*.

Now she did not care what people said about her for, slowly but surely, life's scar-tissue was forming over her sensibilities. It is probably a good thing on the whole to be careless of what other people think, because it is the attribute of characterless, stereotyped nonentities to care too much. But it is certainly a bad thing - if behaviour can be so simply catalogued - to deliber-

ately flout public opinion, which can be and sometimes is a salutary influence. This was Kate's danger when the aftermath of George Kettle's death had blown away: from caring too much what was said about her, she began to care too little.

Kate was learning things about herself all the time.

Belle Darling arrived one afternoon unannounced at the *Villa Eglantine*. With her in the carriage was a tall, cadaverous man with a long upper lip who looked like an undertaker. Belle introduced him as Bromley Harcourt, the surviving and only partner in the old China firm of Harcourt Brothers, known chiefly for their important position in the silk trade.

Kate, not knowing what it was all about and particularly not knowing that Harcourt was a prospective client, gave them tea. Harcourt sat on the edge of his chair sipping tea uncomfortably and said virtually nothing. He was a man in late middle age. After tea, Belle Darling took him back to where she had found him, returning to the *Villa Eglantine* immediately afterwards.

'Kate, honey,' she said expansively, 'it's time you went to work. This Guy Harcourt is really loaded. He still has seventy-five cents of every dollar he ever handled an' he wants to spend some of it on you.'

'But Belle, he's old enough to be my father!'

'Course he is. They all are . . . the ones with dough. The young ones, even if they have dough, don't have to buy it. They get it for free. The real pretty ones even sell it!'

With Belle Darling as intermediary, Harcourt made a generous settlement on Kate and, on the latter's insistence, bought her a small house in the unfashionable Hongkew district where, he fondly believed, his extra-marital frolics would pass without notice. He also bought for Kate, through his Manchurian branch office in Harbin, a full-length Russian sable coat made from several thousand finely worked sable cars. It was a museum piece, already more than a century old when he bought it. Kate had it remodelled and it showed no signs of wear fifty years later.

Harcourt, on the other hand, did show signs of wear and Mrs

Harcourt made life so unpleasant for him that the idyll with Kate lasted less than six months. Through someone's indiscretion she learned that Kate had the sable coat which had been intended for her originally. She even made a valiant attempt to claim it as her own property. Kate listened to her tirade in silence. As she was leaving, Kate said: 'If you had given your husband what he wanted, Mrs Harcourt, I expect he would have given you the coat.'

'Did *you* give him what he wanted?' demanded the outraged wife.

'I doubt it, Mrs Harcourt,' replied Kate, 'but I gave him what he thought he wanted and'—she delivered her Parthian shot savagely—'at least my mouth wasn't perpetually turned down at the corners.'

This began by the statement that Kate was learning things about herself. She learned as she slammed the front door of the little house in Hongkew for the last time and put it in the hands of an agent for sale, that despite tedious hours in bed with Harcourt, he had barely rippled the placid surface of her being. Not only had he not touched her spiritually, but physically it was as though he had never existed.

'What sort of a guy was he really?' Belle Darling asked Kate when the smoke had blown away.

'I don't think he was a bad chap,' replied Kate reflectively. 'If he had been, I think, I would have remembered it.'

'What did he talk about?'

'About himself. Men always do, don't they? Do you know, Belle, I don't really believe that it is sex which attracts men to women like me. They pay us to listen to them because nobody else will.'

'Kate, honey,' said Belle, regarding her with a certain awe, 'you're prob'ly dead right but'—she tried to penetrate the serene mask she saw—'you're too goddam young to know things like that.'

Gordon Maitland, one of whose valued clients was Bromley Harcourt, avoided Kate for months afterwards. He could not face the picture conjured up in imagination of the unlvely

Harcourt in Kate's embrace. Maitland was a man doomed, it seemed, to be too late, for by the time he could bring himself to see Kate again, she was installed in the best suite of the Astor House Hotel as the mistress of a man named Jordan Kaldoon Samphire, a shadowy figure who, according to rumour, flitted anywhere in the Far East where there was a dirty dollar to be made. But when his detractors were asked to be specific about his misdeeds, they took shelter in vague generalities. 'A chap like Jakes,' they would say, 'covers his tracks too well.'

Jakes, as he was usually called, was believed to be of British Levantine origin, but even on this point nobody seemed sure. He must have been wealthy for he maintained permanent hotel suites in Peking, Shanghai, Manila and, possibly, elsewhere. He owned no real property anywhere. He had no office, no employees except a nephew who acted as courier-cum-secretary, and no intimates.

'People assumed, because I shared his bed,' Kate said of this period in her life, 'that I knew him well. I didn't. He once talked in his sleep and this is what he said: "Ten per cent is no damn good to me. Twenty-five, or the deal's off."'

On one occasion Kate told Jakes that people were constantly trying to get at him through her, believing that she had inside information about his transactions. 'Be smart and let 'em think so,' he urged her. 'Make 'em pay for information. I'll feed you plenty for them to bite on.'

'Of all the men I knew in my life,' Kate said, 'I had more respect for Jakes than any of them. There was never any possibility of a misunderstanding with him. He gave me a large lump sum when I went to live with him, paid all the hotel expenses of course, and gave me \$1,000 Mex. per month. "If on the first of a month the bank tells you that it hasn't come and you find the suite locked," he said, "you'll know the party is over. When you get tired of me, just you walk out. I shall understand. Meanwhile, I want exclusive rights, because I don't like sharing anything with anybody."'

It lasted a year. Kate described that year as 'mildly happy'. This was high praise indeed. During that year he gave her

enough money, plus the financial know-how, to acquire a controlling interest in a small timber-importing business, which brought in oak from Japan, Douglas Fir from British Columbia, redwood, or cedar as it was called, from California, and pine-wood from wherever it was cheapest. There was nothing basically wrong with Whangpoo Lumber Yards, Ltd except that it had been managed by a fool.

Through Jakes and on his advice, Kate acquired, for next to nothing, a concern called the Shanghai Collections Agency, which had earned a precarious living for an American for years. He was now dead and the Chinese who had always done the work, a man named Wing, was ready to go on running it at the same salary and commission, which was slightly more than covered by income. 'But Jakes,' Kate protested, 'what on earth can I do with a debt-collecting agency?'

'I'll tell you,' Jakes replied. 'This chap Wing knows more about the credit rating of Shanghai people than all the banks put together. If, at the time we met, you'd asked Wing about me as a credit risk, he'd have told you I was no bloody good. What's more, he'd have been right then.'

So Mr Wing and the agency were added to Kate's growing possessions.

Of Jakes, Kate said: 'He was a big, black, glossy man. He had a great mane of glossy black hair. He almost always wore black . . . even black silk pyjamas. In summer he wore black alpaca suits and at all times his shoes were shone like patent leather. His glossiness was visible in a crowd at a great distance. I told him once that he reminded me of a black cocker spaniel into whose coat someone had rubbed a pound of butter . . . the best butter, of course. He liked that.'

It was a cold-blooded relationship in one sense, but from here it looks far more honest than many marriages. It ended in a strange way. Kate and Jakes were at breakfast together in Peking, where Jakes was trying to obtain some concession from the Chinese Government. He had a bad hangover and was coughing. 'You were drunk last night, Jakes,' said Kate, 'and you've been drinking and smoking too much for weeks.'

Jakes looked thunderous but said nothing.

During the morning Kate went for a walk by herself. When she returned Jakes had packed and his cases were being removed by the hotel porters. 'Hello! Going somewhere?' she asked.

'I'm clearing out for good, Kate. It's all over.'

'Something wrong?'

'Yes, you're beginning to get wifely and I couldn't stand that. Be a good girl!' With a pat on her bottom he was gone.

Months later, a messenger left a small package at the *Villa Eglantine* in Shanghai. In it was a cocker spaniel carved out of black crystal, or it might have been jet, just as black and glossy as the man who had sent it. With it was a brief note, typical of the man. It said:

Buy Simbolo Oil. Sell at around \$30. Don't chatter.
Your successor is fairly good in bed, but she sucks her
teeth. Pray for me.

JAKES

Simbolo Oil was a Shanghai company, formed to exploit an oil concession in Borneo. The shares had recently dropped from \$15 to \$2. A week after Kate had bought two thousand shares, oil was struck. The shares rocketed back to their previous 'high'. On a hunch, Kate sold only hours before news reached Shanghai that the reports from Borneo about an oil strike had been faked.

Twenty-one

A diary entry, undated. Assuming C.B. to refer to Charles Borbridge, she said of him: 'C.B. is about to become a problem. He has been kind to me, but he is a silly little man. The Besotted Banker! Whatever I decide to do will be wrong. A whore is always in the wrong. She lives on the wrong side of the fence.'

IN 1910 or 1911 – the date is unimportant – a circus was stranded in Shanghai. Even the name of the circus has not survived. Among those left on the beach was a freak who called himself Ivan the Terrible. He was alleged to be a Russian, stood seven feet five inches in height and was, apart from his great stature, a perfectly normal man, although outside the circus there seemed to be no place for him. He was too conspicuous.

Brentana, who had a kind heart if one dug deeply enough to find it, gave Ivan the Terrible the job of 'bouncer' at The Wheel. He looked tough and was able to scare drunks into good behaviour, but when he came up against anyone who really was tough, Ivan folded up. There was just simply no aggression in his genes. Knowing that he was bigger and stronger than other people had made him gentle, rather than the opposite. He wanted to be friends with everyone, just as most people seem to have been kindly disposed towards him.

Ivan had an enormous appetite. Various stories have survived of gargantuan meals he is alleged to have eaten. At an amusement palace in the Chinese city he issued an open challenge to out-eat anyone, forgetting that in a land where millions died every year from starvation, feats of gluttony were not calculated to be popular. Ivan's challenge was soon withdrawn when, on the first day, two rickshaw coolies, who had never in their lives had the opportunity to eat half as much as they wanted, out-eat him. Even the fact that one of them died at the table

did not restore 'face'. Ivan the Terrible was a terrible flop.

Then Kate heard of him and offered him a job. The debt-collecting agency she had acquired on the advice of Jakes had on its books some \$350,000 in debts regarded as uncollectable and most of them were just that. With Wing as negotiator behind the scenes, for Shanghai never did learn that Kate was the owner of the agency, these bad debts were bought outright for a mere trifle.

Sending for a Chinese tailor, Kate had him make a suit for Ivan. In cut it was a perfectly normal frock-coat, but there the normality ended. One trouser leg was bright blue, while the other was canary yellow. The frock-coat likewise had a left sleeve yellow, left body of the coat blue, right body yellow and right sleeve blue. This surmounted by a silk hat with the same colour scheme, was somewhat conspicuous, on a man seven feet five inches tall.

Ivan's arrival on the premises of Shanghai's more respectable business and financial houses caused a stir. It caused even more of a stir in the respectable residential districts. He was unfailingly polite, but quietly persistent. His instructions were not to budge until paid, or until some genuine acknowledgment of the debt had been made, preferably accompanied by something on account. If not paid at the end of the day, he had to go the next day.

Even the most chronic welchers paid. They had to, because nobody's reputation could stand the fantastic Ivan lurking in corridors, outside clubs and, on at least one occasion, in the restaurant of the Astor House Hotel.

Needless to say, only a fractional part of the total debts was paid, but it was enough to enable Ivan to earn more money than he had ever earned, with some left over to pay Kate for her trouble.

Ivan became an institution. He was by nationality, it transpired, something Balkan, from a country which had no extra-territorial treaty with China. The only court which had jurisdiction over him was, therefore, the International Mixed Court which frowned on his way of earning a living and threatened to commit him to prison as a nuisance.

Once again, Commendatore Moschetti stepped into the breach and a deal was made by which Ivan the Terrible became a fairly loyal subject of the Italian crown. When the necessary bribes were paid, he was untouchable.

This was one of the few—sadly few—amusing episodes in Kate's life in Shanghai. Indeed, it was more than an episode, for Ivan became an institution.

Parallel with Kate's rise from obscurity and poverty to riches and notoriety, was that of Gordon Maitland. At least, he prospered and the only notoriety he ever achieved was that reflected by Kate. Just how Shanghai knew of his devotion to Kate is something neither of them ever knew. But the chances were that Shanghai, seeing these two together over the years, and knowing that it was Gordon who pinned on her the sobriquet 'Singapore Kate', drew its own conclusions.

Ironically, as already stated, Gordon's rise to prominence and comparative wealth owed much, directly and indirectly, to John Ingleby.

Maitland's love and devotion were as real as these can be. There can be no doubt about this. But mixed up with love and devotion was a tremendous sense of guilt and a consciousness of the load of responsibility which lay on his shoulders for having, unwittingly, but just as effectively as if done deliberately, turned a sweet-natured, unaffected girl into a . . . what?

Kate's whole life had been ruined, but not entirely by Gordon Maitland. Colin Wilder had been the prime architect of her troubles. There is reason to believe that Gordon assumed much more than his share of the blame as he saw the woman he still loved pass through the hands of a succession of rich lechers, but even this is guesswork. His life, too, was ruined. He made money largely because, having no life outside his business, he concentrated all his efforts on it. At the back of his mind as he amassed money was always the thought that he would be able to take Kate away to some other part of the world to make a fresh start. But this hope soon faded when it became apparent

that Kate was making far more money than he was. Those perishable commodities, youth and beauty, have a high market value until they begin to fade.

It was Gordon Maitland's cross that he had to watch them fade, unable to do anything about it.

To the eye Kate had changed very little in the years she had been in Shanghai. Her figure was lithe and voluptuous as ever. At thirty-odd years of age her face was still that of a girl in the early twenties. But it was the eyes which had changed. Their cold grey was a little colder, seldom coming to life with warmth and humour. The eyes seemed to see everything, but reveal nothing. Warmth is not self-generating. It was such a long time since the world had given her warmth that she had none to spare.

More than once Gordon made a passionate plea to be allowed to right the wrong he had done. 'When eggs are broken, Gordon,' Kate said with a hopeless finality, 'they won't hatch. All you can do with them is to make an omelet. All right, I'm making an omelet. If you are wise, you'll do the same.'

It was fear of poverty rather than love of money which caused Kate to give so much of her thought to making money. She was piling it up as a kind of buttress against the possibility of ever wanting again. It was an achievement, a goal. The more money there was, the safer she felt, for having known real poverty, she could not face it again.

Kate had almost no expensive tastes. The furs and jewellery she possessed had been given to her and she almost never wore the latter. In those days it was possible to live in luxury on the China Coast for very little. Her chief amusement was gambling and, being a really fine poker player, she seldom rose from the table a loser.

Appearing in public at the races, concerts, the theatre and elsewhere became less attractive as time went on. Being a notorious woman, people did not trouble to lower their voices for her, and it always offended her to hear herself being pointed out to newcomers. 'That's the woman I told you about . . . Singapore

Kate.' And there would follow, with no regard for accuracy, a hair-raising biographical sketch.

So Kate tended to live more and more within herself. At the *Villa Eglantine* she had a piano, a fine library and a garden which would have been a show piece if there had been anyone to show it to. There was something almost monastic about the simplicity of her life at home. 'Business' was never allowed to intrude there and, since John Ingleby's death, no man had been upstairs. The room where he died had been turned into a library and music-room. Kate had chosen for her bedroom a quite small room on the other side of the villa. Here, without conscious intention, she had re-created a replica of the attic room she had had at home in England. Here were a severely plain oak bedroom suite, chintz curtains, a bedside bookshelf and, as the only picture, a photo of her parents taken on their wedding day.

Kate had no real intimates. The men with whom she had shared her bed had not been interested in her mind. When not in bed, they had talked about themselves and, since it was an essential part of her trade, she had gone through the motions of listening. There were only two people with whom Kate felt able to talk with any kind of freedom. One was John, whom she now called Old John, because his son, Young John, doubled as coachman and bodyguard. Between Kate and Old John had sprung up a deep bond of affection. Each had cause to be grateful to the other and neither would ever forget.

Although Old John knew that his mistress was an expensive whore, he treated her with the same courtesy and deference he had once shown to the Governor's lady in Hongkong, plus something added for affection. He had taught Young John to speak his own stilted brand of English and had impressed upon him that Kate was a special kind of person for whom unlimited allowance must be made and to whom unlimited loyalty was due.

Kate's other intimate, if he could be called that, was equally improbable, being no other than Mr Charles Borbridge, the banker. It came about quite naturally when Kate began to realize that her visits to him at the bank were attracting too much atten-

tion and causing whispers. Having no wish to embarrass the man, Kate suggested that as he lived in the French Concession, less than a half-mile from the *Villa Eglantine*, this might be a better place to discuss business. Borbridge agreed and, once or twice monthly, called after office hours by pre-arrangement. Shanghai now had a telephone service, which was eliminating the cumbersome, but pleasing, custom of written communications sent by private messenger.

Thanks to Borbridge, most of Kate's investments turned out well and she was able to avoid one or two which, but for his advice, would have cost her a great part of her capital. After some months, the intervals between Borbridge's visits became shorter, while the visits themselves became longer and the reasons for them flimsier. Needless to say, none of this escaped Kate's notice, but for a time she pretended to see nothing abnormal. Truth to tell, she was greatly embarrassed by the obvious implications, but reluctant to do anything to hurt the man's feelings, for he had been excessively kind.

How many ways are there for a lovely woman to repay the kindness of a rich man, nearly twice her age and married to a sour-faced wife who, in bored desperation, has taken refuge in good works?

Send him a Morocco-bound copy of Browning's poems?

Kate was truly grateful and wanted to show her gratitude. But how? How? However she were to do it, for his sake it must be secret. How many secret ways were there of showing gratitude?

Kate could think of only one, and the more she thought about it, the less she liked it, more for his sake than her own. Men, especially men of Borbridge's dangerous age, had strange fancies, as she well knew, and if she were to offer him the delights within her power, where would it end? She was thinking of him, not herself.

Borbridge was a key money man, certainly the most important money man in Shanghai and probably on the China Coast. He was within a year of retirement. A mistake now could have disastrous consequences for him because the world demanded

a higher standard of conduct from a banker than from a bishop. Money was sacred.

Kate had no illusions about what Charles Borbridge wanted. So far in her experience, the male goal was the bed. She had no desire to sleep with the man, but it would not have troubled her greatly and would have been no more uninteresting and less actively unpleasant than many nights she had known. Her only concern was not to bring trouble on a man from whom she had had nothing but kindness and consideration.

Kate played with the idea of demanding from Borbridge a sum of money so outrageous that he would rebel, but she rejected it on the ground that he might be besotted enough to pay, which would have given him a kind of moral ascendancy. She contemplated taking a long sea voyage to escape his importunities. But finally, on the sound principle that it was never good to run from trouble, she resolved to have it out with him.

Now Charles Borbridge was a man true to his gods. Although the very sight of Kate now inflamed his passions to a degree he never remembered, all his advice was sound and the best he knew how to give. 'In my considered opinion, Miss Marlowe,' he said on his next visit, 'the right and proper thing for you to do is to realize your assets now, while you are still young, and go to some other part of the world where you can . . . leave all this behind,' he added lamely. 'You do not need any more money. Invested in the most conservative possible way and providing for all reasonable contingencies, you can have an income for life of nearer £5,000 than £4,000. With it you can live in luxury anywhere in the world. Why not do it, my dear Miss Marlowe?'

'As much as that?' said Kate, turning over the prospect in her mind.

'Yes, my dear, as much as that.'

'I believe I'll do just that,' said Kate slowly. 'God knows, there's nothing to hold me here. All the same, I like to sleep on big decisions.'

'Sleep on it by all means. I hope in the morning you will telephone me and let me know what you have decided.'

Old John chose that moment to bring in a tray of drinks. He had been listening at the keyhole, so was able to time his entry well. He knew, of course, the wild fantasies which were whirling in the banker's brain. Only that morning, he had said to his wife: 'There is a look in the money man's eyes that one sees in those of a dog chasing after a bitch. He will bring trouble.'

Old John puttered as long as he decently could, hoping that it would not be necessary to leave these two alone again. He had few illusions about the Indian summer of elderly Europeans.

Reluctantly, having no more excuse to remain in the room, Old John retired to his quarters.

Twenty-two

The Memory Box contained no photograph of Charles Borbridge, but it contained something just as telling. A cartoon, cut from some unidentifiable magazine—it might have been Punch—depicted a huge cask labelled 'Rum'. Some of the rum was leaking on to the floor of a cellar. A mouse which had evidently just been sampling the rum is sitting up on its haunches, twirling its whiskers. 'Now,' says the mouse, 'where's that damned cat?' Kate's comment is: 'C.B. to the life!'

FOR A COUPLE of hours after the banker had left her, Kate sat alone, deep in thought, refusing dinner and telling the servants she wanted nothing more that evening. The more she pondered her circumstances, the more she believed that Borbridge was right. She should have left Shanghai several years previously and only obstinacy had kept her from doing so. Kate Marlowe would be damned if she would allow Shanghai, which had made her what she was, to drive her out because it didn't like its own handiwork. That, in a nutshell, had been her attitude.

Kate was not greedy for money. What she had amassed had been, as she saw things, a tribute levied on Shanghai for the way it had treated her. Now surely, she argued, she had proved her point, proved that Kate Marlowe did not run away. It was time that Singapore Kate faded off the scene. She glanced at the clock. It was almost midnight, the hour when Cinderella, her feet twinkling in the glass slippers, she laughed at the analogy—vanished from the ball and went home.

As for Borbridge, Kate decided quite dispassionately, the kindest thing to do and the most practical way of showing her gratitude to him, would be to wait until just before she were leaving Shanghai altogether before giving him what Belle Darling would call a roll in the hay. He would go back to

England and retirement, hugging to himself the knowledge—and that was how it would seem—that he had had a romantic affair with the notorious Singapore Kate and—how the little man would twirl his moustache with pride!—she had given him her all for nothing.

That way, Kate mused, the score between them would be level. She could draw a line, in the fashion of an accountant, and close the account. If that was what the man wanted, he should have it.

Kate mused for a while on the paradox that sex, out of which she had carved a fortune, was become the least important thing in her life. Well, there was justice in that. She had sold it, so why expect to keep it. It was like eating your cake and having it, or vice versa.

She was not tired so, on the spur of the moment, Kate telephoned The Wheel, asking for a carriage to be sent for her. Brentana had one or two cars for this service, but Kate preferred horse-drawn vehicles. At heart she was still a country girl.

As the carriage left the blind turning where the *Villa Eglantine* was situated, Kate caught a glimpse of Borbridge, pacing the quiet street like the proverbial caged tiger. Rain had begun to fall. That would cool him off, t'—silly little man. Moths fluttering around the chimney of a lamp were no more eager to have their wings burned than these ageing men who fancied themselves as snorting young stallions.

The decision to wind up her affairs and quit Shanghai for ever had relaxed Kate. She had shed her usual tenseness, found herself laughing easily and looking forward to the rest of the night at Brentana's establishment. She would not play poker, she decided, for poker was too intense for her mood. Roulette was the game, because at roulette the little ivory ball did all the work and the thinking.

Kate's entry caused a stir, as it always did wherever she went, partly because of her spectacular beauty and the rest from her notoriety. Usually, she pretended not to notice the stir, but this evening she glared contemptuously at the faces upturned to stare

at her, forcing the curious and often hostile eyes to drop before hers. She did not care what they thought of her. All that mattered was that soon, very soon, she would see their hateful faces for the last time.

Before playing, Kate went into the dining-room, ordering a fish soufflé flavoured with chopped red peppers, a Creole dish from the Caribbean. She ate with relish. Even food tasted better now that a decision had been reached. A liqueur brandy with the coffee and she was ready for anything.

At the roulette table, Kate lost steadily for more than an hour. The losses were not large because, when losing, she never committed the cardinal folly of chasing losses with increased stakes. A strange sensation of pleasure came over her as the losses mounted. For years now her consistent winning at games of chance had troubled Kate. It had seemed one more of many things which divided her off from the rest of humanity. It was as though the gods who governed chance were tossing her a bone by way of compensation for more unpleasant things in store for her. Most people lost when they gambled, so Kate felt that she had now rejoined the human race.

The grey light of the false dawn was in the sky when Kate arrived back at the *Villa Eglantine*, where a steady drizzle was still falling. As the carriage drove away and she was opening the front door with her latch-key, the bedraggled, woebegone figure of Mr Charles Borbridge crept out of the shrubbery. Torn between annoyance and laughter, Kate said: 'It's a good thing that your co-directors can't see you now, or I don't know what they would think.'

'I wouldn't care,' he said defiantly. 'I don't care about anything . . . or anyone, except you, Miss Marlowe. . . .'

'You'd better come in and have a cup of hot coffee, or a stiff whisky,' said Kate, adding, 'before you go home.'

He drank two strong whiskies, which warmed him but loosened his tongue. Much of Kate's success in her ancient profession was due to her ability to feign interest and conceal boredom while misunderstood husbands vomited their stories in her lap. Borbridge's conformed in detail to the weary old

pattern. Mrs Borbridge was a fine woman, but—. 'But' was always the operative word in these recitals.

Kate seemed to listen intently, because it was the kind thing to do and she was actuated—however much it nauseated her—by no other motive than to be kind. It was full daylight when he started to tell her about how wonderful, how beautiful and how sympathetic she was by implicit comparison with Mrs Borbridge.

'Even if you don't, Mr Borbridge,' said Kate, smothering a yawn, 'I need some sleep.'

It was with the greatest difficulty that she got him out of the house and then only by promising to spend an evening with him very soon. Her last waking thought was that the sooner she realized her Shanghai investments and quit, the better it would be, both for her and the infatuated banker.

Mr Charles Borbridge was not only Number One of the Shanghai branch of his bank, but General Manager for the Far East, a post which included responsibility for eleven other branches. He was about to leave to inspect the Japan branches, and when he implored Kate to travel with him, the only reason she agreed was that indiscretions at sea were less indiscreet than in Shanghai, where almost nothing could be hidden.

They booked passages separately, outward by the French mail steamer and back by the P. & O.

Kate looked forward to the trip with nothing but distaste. At best it would be boring; at worst disgusting. In no circumstances whatever, she was determined, would she accept money from Borbridge and, once the trip was over, she would do her utmost not to see him again. The only reason she agreed to go with him at all was that she feared, if she did not, that he would make a fool of himself and wreck his career.

This last consideration weighed heavily with Kate, who shrank from thinking of herself as a *femme fatale*. Despite what had happened to John Ingleby and George Kettle, she did not believe that it was in her power, even if she wanted to, to destroy

men. It was men's vanity and stupidity which destroyed them.

Kate knew two Charles Borbridges. One was the High Priest of Mammon, suave, correct, weighing every word carefully. The other was the fatherly Charles Borbridge, with a wild light which was occasionally allowed to gleam in his eyes, who sipped tea, even a whisky and soda, at the *Villa Eglantine*, mostly correct in his behaviour but not averse to patting a knee in order to emphasize a point.

Aboard the French ship there was a third Charles Borbridge, the devil of a fellow, far more concerned with the wine list than the compound interest table, with other things on his mind than playing the rôle of misunderstood husband.

The French flag has for more than a century, really ever since people began to travel for pleasure, had a most peculiar effect upon Englishmen, who seem to feel that it gives them licence to behave in a way they would not dream of behaving in their own country. It was so in the case of Charles Borbridge, who shed his inhibitions so speedily and completely that Kate—who knew something of men minus their inhibitions—was alarmed. 'Mr Borbridge!' she exclaimed in horror when he came into her room wearing a silk dressing-gown, which he threw off with impatience, to reveal his spindly legs clad in blue and white striped underpants.

'For heaven's sake call me Charles . . . Charlie if you like!' he said in a firm, loud, masterful voice she had never heard before.

'Put some clothes on at once!' snapped Kate in a school-marm manner. 'We haven't had dinner yet.'

'Food! Who wants food?'

'I do for one,' said Kate, 'so please go away and let me dress . . . and stop behaving like a goat . . . if goats do behave in the way we're told they do.'

Then a steward arrived with the bottle of champagne Borbridge had ordered. With the second glass, it seemed to Kate that sparks were flying from the tips of his moustache. The champagne inflamed him beyond all reason and it was

only with great difficulty that he could be persuaded to go in to dinner.

A score of Shanghai passengers had joined the ship, at least half of whom either Kate, or Borbridge, knew or knew by sight. Certain it was that they would all recognize her.

When Kate entered the dining-room, she asked the head waiter to put her at a small table. The head waiter, who not only knew who she was, but knew that she and Borbridge had been drinking champagne together in her room, ushered him to her table when he arrived, only to be told haughtily that she did not want anyone at her table. He would never, he decided, understand the English.

The champagne, with the other wines he drank at dinner, caused Borbridge to cast discretion to the winds. He was infuriated when Kate, with a book under her arm, took an arm-chair in the corner of the lounge and read while an orchestra played light Viennese music. She could feel his baleful eye on her, while his impatient bearing said as plainly as words: 'Why read when the time could be better spent in bed?'

Kate's attitude of mind, now that the die was cast, was that of an adult humouring a child. Borbridge had by implication been promised a treat and, like a child, was intolerant of delay. With a sense of foreboding, she went down to her room.

The two nights aboard the French ship had for Kate the tragicomic elements which she had grown to expect from life. Borbridge himself was at once a comic and pathetic figure. But he was a man, too, tender and ardent, learning at fifty-five things which most youngsters knew at twenty-five. Hitherto, sex had been for him a grim prison. He did not say so because he did not need to say so: his behaviour made it self-evident. He was like a prisoner just released from a dark dungeon, blinking wonderingly in the sunshine, revelling in his freedom, but a little frightened none the less.

The details, which were not particularly edifying, are better guessed than told. They lend themselves to a French farce, which was how Kate herself told the story, but equally to a drama

loaded with ill-understood Freudian jargon. One sentence of Borbridge's tells the whole story. Some time during that first night, lying spent and weary beside Kate, he said in tones in which awe and wonderment fought for supremacy against fatigue: 'I never knew it could be like that!'

Telling the story nearly forty years later, Kate said: 'I know that it sounds rather like a testimonial from a satisfied customer, but for me it made it possible to endure what followed. I had done what I had done from gratitude, to make the little man happy. Well, he *was* happy . . . while it lasted.'

From Shanghai back to Shanghai, the idyll with Charles Borbridge lasted fifteen days. On the fourteenth evening, they ate dinner separately in the dining-room of the ship as usual. Kate went for a turn on deck to see that the yellow mud-charged water of the Yangtze River had come two hundred miles out to meet them. She dreaded returning to Shanghai, but her dread was mixed with relief that she would soon be rid of the little banker, whose Indian summer, at first amazing, then amusing, was now a bore. She had done what she set out to do and, to quote her own words years later, 'I felt like a boy scout who had just done his daily good deed.'

Kate was now anxious to wind up her affairs and quit Shanghai for ever. She did not know where she would go. Anywhere looked good so long as it was a long way from Shanghai.

Below decks, Borbridge asked the question which showed how his mind was working. 'Only a few more hours,' he said, 'then what shall we do?'

'*We* aren't going to do anything,' replied Kate firmly. 'You are going back to your desk . . . and your home, while I'm going to sell up everything and find some place in the world where nobody knows me and nobody points at me and says: "There goes that dreadful Singapore Kate." So don't waste time making plans which include me.'

'You can't mean that, my dear!'

'But I do mean it, Mr . . . Charles.'

It would have developed into a violent quarrel if Kate, determined to see it through to the end, had not stifled some of the

things which came to her lips. The end, as she envisaged it, was the moment when the ship's anchor hit mud at the mouth of the Whangpoo River. Until then, but not for an hour afterwards, she was prepared to continue with the whore's charade of simulated affection, admiration and passion. It was a part of the job, like that of the actor, anxious to get back to his lodgings and the tripe and onions simmering for him on the stove, who tells the audience how wonderful they have been and how it breaks his heart to leave them.

There would be business talks with Borbridge, but not many of these and then—Kate exulted at the thought—freedom. If there were ever a man in her future, it would be because she loved him, not because he had money. She had not yet faced the possibility that the rôles might be reversed and that, as a rich woman, men would pursue her for her money.

Old John looked troubled. 'What is it?' asked Kate, although she really knew the answer.

'It is the money man, madam. He will not go away,' replied the old Chinese, who was probably the only servant on the China Coast who addressed his employer as 'madam'. 'He says he *must* see you, madam, and he refuses to go away.'

'All right, John,' said Kate in desperation, 'show him in.'

This had been going on for weeks. Refusing to discuss business at the bank, or at any reasonable hour, Borbridge had laid siege to the *Villa Eglantine*, appearing at all hours of the night, demanding admission. Even if not delivered in so many words, his ultimatum amounted to a refusal to discuss business—Kate's business—anywhere but in bed. It had its funny side, but not to Kate. 'This,' she said as the banker was shown into the room, 'has gone far enough. Tomorrow morning, I give you fair warning, I am coming to the bank to close my account. A joke is a joke, but I have had enough.'

'Take your account wherever you please, my dear. I didn't come here to discuss business.'

'But that is all I am ready to discuss with you,' said Kate

tartly. 'There isn't anything else. The rest is over, so draw a line and forget it.'

'Forget it?' he wailed in anguished tones. 'How can I forget the most important thing that has happened in my life? I love you, my beautiful Kate, I love you. I want to make plans for the future . . . our future.'

'*We* haven't any future. Only a past. So make the best of it, and now, you must excuse me, but I am going to bed. I am tired and I have a busy day tomorrow.'

The thought flashed across Kate's mind that Borbridge, who in these last weeks seemed to have shed the weight of his years, looked rather like a rakehell tom-cat as he stood there twirling his moustache. Was he, she wondered, like John Ingleby, who had believed in an almost superstitious way that in her body he would find the fountain of eternal youth?

'I won't go,' he said firmly.

'Don't talk like a fool! You bore me!'

Kate wished a moment later that she had not said this, because there was the danger of demolishing the false structure created by the trip to Japan. Borbridge, as she knew, saw it all as a romantic interlude, perhaps the only romantic interlude of his dry and sterile life. Using a whore's arts, only because she had wished to be kind, she had left in his mind the thought that for her too this was romance. Early in the trip he had offered her money in the form of a cashier's draft which could not be traced to him. She had refused to accept it, without even looking at the amount.

'I bore you, eh? What kind of a woman are you?' he asked rhetorically. 'One day you behave as though you love me and then, for no reason that I know, I bore you.'

'The party is over,' said Kate viciously. 'Can't you get that into your head? Your hostess is yawning, waiting for you to go. You are outstaying your welcome, Mr Borbridge.'

'How dare you talk to me that way?' he asked angrily, touched on the raw.

'Listen, little man. So far I have been trying to be polite. Don't push me too far, or you'll hear things about yourself that

will make your hair curl . . . anyway, what's left of it.'

It was the 'little man' that got under his skin. For what was almost certainly the first time in his life, Charles Borbridge hit a woman. It was a hard slap which nearly knocked Kate off her feet.

Taut with rage, she rang the bell. 'John,' she said icily, 'this man is leaving. If he won't leave quietly, fetch a policeman and have him thrown out. No,' she added, 'on second thoughts, don't do that. Look up the number of his home telephone in the book and ask Mrs Borbridge to come and fetch him.'

'You are too late, Kate, so don't waste time making empty threats. My wife knows everything. I told her about us earlier this evening.'

'You bloody fool!' said Kate in a dead voice, turning her back on him.

No outsider can ever see the inwardness of a marriage. The most he can achieve is to base inspired guesswork on known facts. The facts of the Borbridge marriage were roughly as follows. Charles was a rising junior in the bank's London office when he met Norah, the painfully plain daughter of Sir Henry Rampayne, who was at the time managing director and later chairman of the board of directors.

Already marked for advancement, Charles Borbridge believed, and as events turned out rightly, that marrying Norah Rampayne could do no harm and might do much good. But what tortured him for the rest of his active life was not knowing how far he might have gone on his own merits, without saddling himself with the graceless Norah. It was the penalty a man pays—and who will quarrel with the justice of it?—for marrying for any reason but love.

Norah Borbridge went through life making a virtue of necessity. She could never have been beautiful, but she need not have been so unappetizing. Her hair was lank and greasy, her complexion muddy. She had little pigs' eyes which glittered with excitement when food appeared. Whatever sex appeal she might

have had vanished. Early in the marriage Charles complained of her habit of squeezing blackheads from her nose, at least in his presence. He voiced the complaint several more times. But on the last occasion, such was his disgust and exasperation, he called her nose a 'snout'.

With a lack of interest in each other amounting to dislike, these two lived together for the next twenty years, although they lived quite separate lives. Norah sublimated her sexual urges in a sort of perverted piety, while Charles tried to sublimate his in work, with the result that he went right to the top.

Early in her pious exercises, Norah discovered that she enjoyed interfering in other lives, so she began to champion all the unattractive virtues and wage war against the attractive sins. At the top of the list, of course, was fornication. She was against it. She gave money to various so-called 'charitable' undertakings designed to squeeze the joy out of life without offering to put anything back in its place. But true charity, which has no institutional smell about it, being merely another word for kindness, had no meaning for her.

Fleeting mention has already been made of the Reverend Jonas Barnaby, the founder-secretary of the Shanghai Council for Public Morality and Decency who, as in the case of Edith Ingleby, was always ready with sympathy for wronged women, provided they were rich. Barnaby was a very quick man to form a league, council, society or other body, with a virtuous-sounding name, always provided that he became its paid secretary. His most profitable undertaking to date was his Save the Little Girls League, founded ostensibly to prevent the Chinese in famine districts from casting unwanted girl babies adrift on the big rivers. Ask almost anyone the question: Are you for, or against, murdering little girls? There will be an amazing unanimity in the replies. Even those who are in favour of this practice will not say so. Barnaby never did anything to stop it, of course, but he deplored it loudly in a little brochure, profusely illustrated, which went all over the world, inviting the charitable to help him in this good work.

Norah Borbridge and Jonas Barnaby were great buddies.

There was nothing sexual about it. When Barnaby's urges troubled him, three choir sopranos competed for the honour of easing him.

When Charles Borbridge told Norah bluntly that he had spent a sinful and delightful fortnight with the notorious Singapore Kate, she was not best pleased. Having watched him carefully for years, without detecting any extra-marital fun and games, she had assumed him to be as desiccated as herself and relaxed her vigilance accordingly.

The confessed fornication was bad enough, but what made it quite unpardonable was that he had not only manifestly enjoyed it, but wanted some more.

At first Norah toyed with the idea of seeking out this Singapore Kate and having a showdown, but much as this appealed to her—for she was a mistress of invective—she could not face being exposed to ridicule. So, deciding to deal with Singapore Kate by proxy, she sent for Jonas Barnaby.

'Jonas,' she said bitterly, but without mentioning why, 'I want this woman run out of Shanghai. I don't care what you do, or what it costs, but she must go. If necessary, hire small boys to throw filth at her . . . anything.'

'Leave it to me, my dear Norah,' he said, holding her hand and wondering why she did not clean her finger-nails. 'I will not fail you.'

Barnaby knew that Charles Borbridge had recently been to Japan. The fact that the name of Kate Marlowe appeared on both the outward and homeward passenger lists, told him all he needed to know. This was evidently not just a case of Norah Borbridge being against the scarlet woman on principle: it meant that she had a deep personal interest and, therefore, would spare no expense.

'I will chastise her with scorpions,' he promised when they next met. It had a much more righteous sound than saying 'I will make her life a hell for her,' which was what he meant.

Twenty-three

Kate reveals much of her self in a brief diary entry made some time in 1913. 'The time has come,' she says, 'to pay some old debts . . . with interest.'

IT CANNOT be over-emphasized that in Shanghai nothing to do with a European could be kept quiet. So when small boys did throw filth at Kate and rude things in Chinese were written on the garden wall, she had a fair idea who had inspired it. Young John captured one of the boys and, choosing a length of bamboo, beat him until he revealed the name of the Reverend Jonas Barnaby. From Barnaby to Norah Borbridge was a simple step.

When it came to pulpit fulminations, Barnaby was handicapped. He was quite good with rousing Old Testament denunciations and windy generalities, but these were not enough to pinpoint the crime of husband-stealing. Whose husband? The question could not be answered without making Norah Borbridge look ridiculous, while a general attack on husband-stealing lost much of its force in a community which tended to regard such matters lightly.

A believer in direct action, Kate called on Barnaby one day at the small house he occupied adjoining what he called 'The Mission'. The essence of the word 'mission' is the fact of 'being sent', but it was never quite clear who, if anyone, had sent the Reverend Jonas Barnaby.

Kate, through Mr Wing of the debt-collecting agency, was well briefed on Barnaby before she called. She had chapter and verse information about his little dalliances, while Mr Wing produced figures which suggested that the prime beneficiary of all Barnaby's good works was Barnaby himself.

'My name,' Kate began, 'is Kate Marlowe. I am told that 'Jezebel' is your favourite name for me. Well, I've come here to tell you, Mr Barnaby, that you would do well to remember the

old saw that people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. . . .'

'I do not know what you mean,' he blustered, 'and I must ask you to leave this house.'

'I'll leave when I am ready to leave, but before I go I want you to know that I have had enough from you . . . and from your employer, Mrs Borbridge. Unless you stop these attacks on me at once, I shall expose you . . .'

'How dare you speak to me like that?' He was white with rage. 'Have you no respect for my cloth?'

'I thought you would ask that,' replied Kate. 'The answer is no. I have no respect for your cloth while you wear it. You are a dirty, philandering, bottom-patting creature'—Kate paused and turned blazing eyes on him—'and you aren't even honest. As for Mrs Borbridge, you may tell her from me that I don't want her husband. I wish she would keep him at home.'

After Kate had gone, Barnaby probably came to the conclusion that he had nothing to fear from her. He believed that he had covered his tracks too well. In other words, Kate was bluffing. Her own position was too vulnerable. That, or something like that, must have gone through his mind. Otherwise, it seems, he would not have ignored the warning.

Kate went out to her hired carriage to find a laughing crowd of Chinese looking at a placard which had been hung behind it. The coachman had vanished. Removing the placard, Kate hailed a rickshaw and told the puller to take her home. 'What does this mean?' Kate asked Old John, handing him the placard, which was written in Chinese. 'It was hanging on the back of my carriage.'

Old John read what was written, but refused to translate it. 'It is too degrading, madam, and even if I had the right English words, I would not use them. It is better, madam, that I destroy it.'

Half a lifetime later, Kate was still bitterly angry when she spoke about it. It was still fresh in her mind. 'I was a human being,' she said, 'with human rights. It was then my turn to behave badly. I suppose,' she admitted, 'I sank to their level.'

One of the less attractive features of life in Shanghai then, and for many years afterwards, was the absence of any proper sewage system. An English family had grown very rich on a sewage removal contract with the Shanghai Municipal Council. The sewage was collected from house to house and poured into rickety tank-carts. These were taken to a point on the Soochow Creek to be emptied into fleets of barges, which went out into the surrounding country where their contents was sold at a high price. The fertility of the farms and vegetable gardens passed belief. The system also ensured the widest possible distribution of typhoid, dysentery and kindred diseases.

Through Mr Wing, who knew everyone, Young John was introduced to one of the sewage carting contractors. Two nights later, several hundred gallons of sewage in an advanced state of putrefaction was deposited on Mrs Borbridge's lawn. During the same night, the ground floor of Barnaby's house was flooded with the same nauseous liquid.

When Mrs Borbridge drove out to the races one afternoon, a cheering mob followed her carriage, on the back of which, in scholarly Chinese ideographs, was written something so impossibly disgusting that Kate was never told what it was. But the story went around that it had reference to Mrs Borbridge's private habits. A photograph taken by a press camera-man survives.

Among the laughing group of Europeans who witnessed the wretched woman's arrival at the race-course was Kate. To the general amusement—for she was not loved—Mrs Borbridge appeared to lose all self-control. Her doctor, who was on the spot, took her home.

There was, of course, nothing which could provably connect Kate with the incident, but Shanghai never doubted that she was the instigator. Shanghai laughed because it all had certain humorous aspects, but Shanghai took a long time to forget that Mrs Borbridge was the wife of one of the city's key personalities and that Singapore Kate, although generally regarded as a 'good sort', was a whore.

Mrs Borbridge, socially speaking, was destroyed. She had

made her last public appearance in Shanghai. A few weeks later, as discreetly as possible, she was sent back to England. It was said that she had lost her reason, which may have been true.

Soon after this, without any further intervention in his affairs by Kate, the Reverend Jonas Barnaby's cruel exploitation of the charitable was exposed. He also left Shanghai for good. Later, in another part of the world, he served a prison sentence for fraud.

All this achieved one purpose. It served notice on Shanghai that Singapore Kate had sharp claws and knew how to use them. But it strengthened the belief, already widely held, especially in the British community, that it was time she left.

The Shanghai Council for Public Morality and Decency died a natural death. Nothing founded by Barnaby could have done otherwise. But another organization, with the same ostensible purposes and a high-sounding name, came into being. As formerly, Kate stood high on the agenda, and it too was known from its inception as the Society for the Suppression of Singapore Kate.

It was this new threat which caused Kate to abandon her plans to leave Shanghai for good. Nobody was going to make her retreat from a stand once taken. But the real deciding factor in her affairs was unexpected.

Early one evening, while she was trying to decide between a quiet evening at home and a gamble at The Wheel, the telephone rang. Belle Darling was on the line. She wanted to talk business, but refused to so much as hint at its nature on the phone. Curious to know what it was, Kate said she would come down during the evening.

When Kate arrived at the house beside the Soochow Creek, she found the mountainous Belle wedged into an easy chair with pillows. Beside her was a bottle of champagne, her only tippie. 'Kate, honey,' she began, 'I'm gettin' old and tired. I guess it's time to quit.'

'What will you do?'

'Go back to Noo York, I guess. The cops have had time to forget . . . things. It's home and I'd kinda like to see it again. One day, maybe, you'll want to go back home where you was raised. We all get that way. Besides, Shanghai's gettin' too damn respectable.'

The winds of reform were beginning to blow and there were those who thought that Belle's open defiance of any form of restraint had to be curbed. A man whose arm she had broken the week before was making trouble. The unreasonable type.

'What's it worth to you, Kate, if I walk out and turn the whole shebang over to you as it stands, lease, furniture, fixin's, gals, debts, servants and goodwill?'

'Let's talk about the lease, Belle. The furniture and decorations give me bad dreams. I wouldn't touch your girls with the end of a pole. The servants are impudent thieves and there isn't any goodwill. Otherwise, I agree, it's a bargain. Put a price on the lease, Belle.'

'My, but you've become a smart girl, Kate! You always was a sassy little bitch,' said Belle admiringly. In her curious way she was fond of Kate. 'There's nine years of the lease to run. It expires in 1922. Give me \$150,000 for it and it's a deal.'

'I'll consider offering you just half of that, Belle, \$75,000. But even then, I'd like to think about it.'

'No dice, Kate. Not a cent under \$100,000, that's for sure.'

Kate's brain was ticking over fast. This—she knew it now—was the moment she had been waiting for for years. 'I might even give you the \$100,000, Belle, but I'd want something else thrown in with the lease.'

'What is it?'

'I want Mary and Toni Simonides, Belle.'

'They're yours . . . f'r nuthin'. What next? But don't put 'em in here or they'll steal you blind.'

'I don't want to put them in here, Belle. I want to put them where they belong . . . behind bars. You tell me how to do it.'

Kate had forgotten, if she had ever known, that Belle Darling belonged to the underworld, whose rigid code did not permit

anyone, however wronged, to bring the police into private disputes. In that world no lower form of life than the informer existed. Now, for profit, she was being asked to become one. Her reply was a glass of champagne thrown in Kate's face. Some choice epithets followed it.

Kate's wintry smile did not change as she took the napkin from the champagne bottle to wipe her face and the front of her dress. 'The offer stands, Belle,' she said from the door. 'Take your time and think it over.'

Kate learned through Mr Wing that Belle Darling was having no success elsewhere. There was, as Kate had said, no goodwill. Even the lease was of doubtful value because, unless enough bribe money was forthcoming, the police had the power to close brothels. Whoever acquired the lease, therefore, had to buy police goodwill with it.

Kate knew this, of course, but she believed she had a way of making the police see things her way. She had known for a long while via Mr Wing that The Acropolis was a key point in the distribution of the more deadly narcotics. Not opium itself, but its derivatives, heroin and morphine. Except that the drugs were brought by seamen, nothing more could be learned. Belle, Kate believed, was not personally involved with the drugs traffic, but even of this she was not sure. But she knew that Belle had enough 'on' Toni and Mary Simonides to put the screws on them and find out anything which they knew.

Detective-Inspector Harrower of the Shanghai Municipal Police was a soured and disillusioned man. He spent his working life tracking down small drug peddlers and sending them to prison, knowing full well that others were eager and waiting to fill their places. At any given moment, he knew where to put his hands on the bigger men, but as he had learned to his cost, they were in most cases untouchable. They covered their tracks too well and, on the rare occasions when they were careless, there were always well-coached witnesses to prove an alibi.

Harrower knew, and had known for years, that The Acropolis

was a kind of post office. Drug information was exchanged there, but several raids had failed to disclose any drugs on the premises. Another fruitless raid would give Simonides the right to claim that he was being persecuted.

Then one evening at his home, Harrower had answered the phone and a woman's voice had said: 'Mr Harrower? This is Kate Marlowe. Do you know who I am?'

'Indeed, yes, Miss Marlowe. What can I do for you?'

'I'd like a talk with you some time quite soon. Not at the Central Police Station, nor anywhere where we would be seen. I suggest that you come out here to the *Villa Eglantine*.'

'Before agreeing to anything of the kind, Miss Marlowe,' the detective said cautiously, 'I'd like to have some idea of what is in your mind to discuss. . . .'

'It's about The Acropolis, Mr Harrower. Does that interest you?'

'I'll say it interests me! When and where? I'll be there.'

'Now if you like. Why not?'

Harrower was a man with little experience of beautiful women. Kate's beauty disconcerted him, made it hard to concentrate on anything else. He poured himself a drink and tried hard to remember that this was an official, not a friendly, visit. He listened.

'If I can make it possible for you to convict the Simonides couple on a drug charge, Mr Harrower, there arises the question of something you can do for me. . . .'

'And that is?' He thought there would be a catch.

'Belle Darling, as you may know, is selling up. I may buy her house. . . .'

'Excuse me, Miss Marlowe,' said Harrower, 'but matters of that kind have nothing to do with me.'

'Maybe not,' said Kate, 'but you have the ear of someone who can say whether I can, or cannot, carry on when Belle leaves. It's up to you to convince that someone that permission to let me run the house is a small price to pay for laying the Simonides by the heels.'

'May I ask what your motive is in this?'

'I should have thought that was obvious, Mr Harrower. Belle's house, run as I would run it, would be a gold-mine.'

'How *would* you run it?'

'Discreetly, Mr Harrower. So quietly that unless the police come looking for it, they won't know it is there. I'm not Belle Darling. She belongs to an age that is gone. There's no place today for her methods.'

'I'll have a talk about this at headquarters and I'll be in touch with you. But you wouldn't be leading me up the garden path, would you, Miss Marlowe? I wouldn't like that.'

'Do I look like a fool?'

'No, not to me you don't. Good night.'

This was the first time Harrower had been close to Singapore Kate, although he knew all about her. No, she didn't look like a fool. But what did she look like? Remembering the glint in those grey eyes, he shivered.

Harrower wasted no time in abstractions. He wanted Toni and Mary Simonides. The methods did not matter, only results. The police, he mused, were like Providence, using strange tools to accomplish their ends. Kate was the best-looking tool he had ever had the chance to work with. What a woman! And with the light out, a man wouldn't see those iceberg eyes.

Twenty-four

Under the date December 31st, 1913, Kate's diary shows some financial and spiritual stock-taking. Cash on hand at the bank is \$33,126.06; securities held by the bank \$218,424.51; land and house property 'about \$250,000'.

'Is this success?' she asks. 'It must be,' she goes on to answer her own question, 'for what other way but money is there to measure a whore's success? But the loneliness of it, oh God, the loneliness!'

BELLE DARLING's philosophy of life was essentially simple. She knew that it was not entirely foolproof, but the rules based on it had proved themselves extremely practical and workable over a long period of time, dealing with a wide variety of people. Human beings were motivated by fear, greed and lust, these in any order. There were, possibly, other motives, but they could be disregarded. There were, for example, men who came to a whorehouse merely to talk about their mothers. Other odd reasons, too.

Belle suspected, as unnatural, all human motive which did not spring from fear, greed or lust. Yet here was Kate, willing to pay out money, lots of money, in revenge for a decade-old injury, real or imagined. Belle knew full well that if Kate reduced her offer to \$50,000, or even less, she would have to accept it for lack of other buyers with ready money available. Furthermore, Kate knew this too, but was willing to pay \$100,000, provided Toni and Mary Simonides were delivered into her hands. Hate and revenge to the tune of \$50,000 worth! When Belle wanted revenge, she took it with her bare hands and feet, kick, bite, gouge, twist and wrench. It was soon over and it made her feel better. There was a satisfaction in violence and brutality that nothing else could give. It was so personal, as

personal as copulation, and in some curious way related. But pay out good money, never!

'Y'know, Kate,' said Belle at their next talk, 'the way I figure it out, y'ought t' be grateful to Mary and her husband. I grant you they're a pair of low-life bastards, but they sure put you on the road to gettin' rich.'

Kate did not trouble to say anything. But it was plain from her bearing that she would not budge an inch.

'Okay, honey,' said Belle after a long silence, 'if you want 'em you can have 'em. It's your money.'

'And it will soon be yours, Belle.'

In those days—the year was 1913—the telephone was not a novelty, but it was only just beginning to come into its own as the great instrument of betrayal. The hissing and crackling masked the subtle nuances of tone, which the listener was left to interpret as he pleased. Best of all, the mouth and the eyes of the speaker—his restless hands, too—were invisible.

'Miss Marlowe?' asked Harrower a few evenings later. 'I am just calling to tell you that the proposal you made the other day has been put up to my superiors and accepted.'

'Then,' said Kate, 'will you please make it possible for me to meet someone in authority . . . face to face.'

'Don't you trust me?'

'No.'

On the following day, the Commissioner himself called on Kate in person, which was the measure of how badly Mary and Toni Simonides were wanted. The bargain was struck standing up. It was from every angle a dirty bargain. Nor did the fact that they stood and the Commissioner refused the proffered drink make it one whit cleaner. But, men being so vastly concerned with meaningless forms, he thought it did.

The old Italian ship being warped into the dock alongside No. 4 godown, Yangtsepoo, was the selfsame ship in which

Aldo Ferrari had made several voyages to China. The fact was without significance. As requested by radio, an ambulance was waiting on the dock to receive a sick man, believed to be suffering from appendicitis.

When the ship was made fast, the groaning man was lowered to the dock by derrick, carried gently to the ambulance, which then drove off. When it was out of sight, a phone call was put through to the Broadway Hotel. 'In about one hour,' said a voice. 'I will be ready,' said Konstantin Pavelitch.

Five minutes or so after he had replaced the receiver of the old-fashioned wall instrument, Konstantin Pavelitch suffered a twinge of conscience, or perhaps of fear. Standing in the lobby was the beautiful Miss Kate Marlowe. What did she want?

'I must speak to you quite privately,' she said. 'It is urgent.'

He led her into his little office.

'You were once very kind to me, Mr Pavelitch,' said Kate. 'I am here now to repay your kindness. I hope I am not too late.'

He sighed with relief. The beautiful fool had swallowed all his smooth talk at face value. She didn't know even now, ten years later, how profitable she had been. In the dimly lighted office she looked just the same. She had been in many beds since then, but they seemed to have left no mark on her.

'Do not speak of kindness, Miss Marlowe. The kindness was yours to honour my poor hotel. . . .'

'There is not a moment to be wasted,' said Kate urgently. 'I have come to tell you that the police know about the sick man.'

'How could they know?' countered Pavelitch, taken off guard.

'Mary Simonides told them,' replied Kate.

'You are sure?'

'Of course I am sure. Would I risk coming here like this if I were not?'

There was good sense in that.

Lifting the receiver, Pavelitch ground the handle of the phone violently and asked for the number of The Acropolis.

'Keep me out of this,' said Kate.

'Toni? Is that you?' gasped Pavelitch. 'The police know about the sick man. Mary told them.'

'You are sure?'

'Of course I am sure. Would I risk phoning you if I were not sure? Do something . . . now, quick.'

Always a hasty man, Toni Simonides did something quick. He beat Mary without mercy until his arm was weary, and until she was unconscious, snoring through a broken bloodied nose.

The ambulance carrying the sick seaman jolted out of the go-down gate into the Yangtsepoo Road, turned right after a mile towards Hongkew, coming to a halt at the gates of the hospital. The ship's officer accompanying the patient identified himself. A nurse at the reception desk said: 'There's been a telephone call for you. You're to ring this number.' She handed him a slip of paper.

Wonderingly, he put a call through to the number indicated. It was answered instantly by a woman's voice. Obsessed by sex after a long womanless voyage, he thought the voice belonged to a beautiful woman. It did. A beautiful woman with hair the colour of burnished copper.

'Thank God you got my message,' said the voice in halting Italian. 'The orders are changed. Go at once . . . with the stretcher to the Broadway Hotel. Ask for Pavelitch. Toni will be there.'

'But my orders were . . .'

'As I told you, the orders are changed. Go now.'

There was a click and the line went dead.

A few moments later the phone bell rang at The Acropolis. Toni answered. 'Pavelitch is waiting for you,' said the same woman's voice which Toni had heard before . . . ten years before, but had forgotten. 'If you go now . . . at once, everything will be all right.'

'Who is that?'

'You know better than to ask such a question!' the voice said sharply. 'Obey orders.'

Glad that in this crisis somebody was cool enough to give

orders, Toni left Mary on the floor in a pool of blood. Locking the door, he hailed a rickshaw, telling the man to take him to the Broadway Hotel.

Detective-Inspector Harrower waited until Konstantin Pavelitch, Toni Simonides, the ship's officer and another man were in the small office of the Broadway Hotel, busily engaged removing small packages of drugs from the hollow steel tubes of a stretcher. All four men, when arrested, had their pockets full of drugs.

The two Italians appeared in due course before the Italian Consular Court, and needless to say were acquitted on some technicality. The drugs in their possession were impounded, in theory for destruction. But they soon found their way back into illicit channels.

Konstantin Pavelitch and Toni Simonides, neither being a national of a Treaty Power, were less fortunate. They appeared before the International Mixed Court, where a British Assessor sat with a Chinese magistrate. Found guilty on the clearest possible evidence, they were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, followed by deportation.

Mary Simonides did not appear until several months later. After the beating she had received, she was on the 'danger' list for nearly a month. Kate Marlowe was in the court-room when Mary came up for trial. Admitting her complicity, she pleaded duress, and was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

There was a dramatic moment after sentence had been passed, when Mary Simonides was being led out. Her eyes met Kate's, remaining locked for some seconds. 'It took a long time,' said Kate with a mirthless laugh, 'but it was worth waiting for.'

On a crisp winter's morning during the dying days of the year 1913, just as the business world of Shanghai was getting into its stride, people on the way to their offices began to march, rather than walk, in time with the thump of drums and the strident strains of a brass band. The noise came down The Bund from the direction of the Garden Bridge.

It was quickly apparent that this was no ordinary band, for it seemed to lack the military precision. But the music was military, switching from the British Grenadiers to a German march. The band, its members all very drunk, was packed into three pony carriages. Behind the band came a flat-topped dray drawn by six scared China ponies, all decked out with multi-coloured silk ribbons. On the flat-topped dray was a scarlet plush throne on which, clad in paddy-green satin and wearing all her diamonds, sat Belle Darling. Clutched in her right hand was a bottle of champagne.

To the relief of many and the regret of very few, loaded with jewels and the loot of two decades of moral piracy, Belle Darling was going home. Unrepentant and roaring drunk, her exit would be long remembered. Four hefty coolies carried her aboard the tender in a cane chair slung between poles. On The Bund, shouting ribald farewells, was a crowd of revellers who had been at the all-night party, men in formal attire and whores in tawdry finery.

It was the end of an era.

There were a few moist eyes at Belle's departure, for towards the end of her career she had shown a certain gruff kindness to unfortunates and, now that she was going, about to pass into the limbo of legend, there was a tendency to believe that her bark had been worse than her bite. In a few years there was destined to be a little group of sentimentalists who, when talking of the 'good old days', would distort Belle's few virtues out of all proportion, forgetting that she had been a conscienceless old virago who clawed and trampled her way to the top of her dubious pinnacle of fame.

An artist who later achieved fame once painted a portrait of Belle. It hangs today in a private house in London. It portrays her elephantine figure, clad in a low-cut purple satin gown, billowing breasts merging into countless chins. She is ablaze with diamonds, one ham-like hand clutching a silver tankard, while on the table beside her is a magnum of champagne. The artist caught Belle's ferocity and she loved it, but was never allowed to have the picture, although commissioned,

because at the last sitting, tired of holding her pose, she threw a bottle at the painter. Some day, perhaps, it will emerge from obscurity, described in a sale catalogue as 'Portrait of a Virago'.

Kate did not appear either at the all-night farewell party, or at the rowdy send-off on The Bund. She said her good-byes the day before. 'I've brought you a keepsake, Belle,' she said, 'something to remember me by.'

The gift was an exquisitely made doll, clad in green silk with burnished copper hair, made from the combings of Kate's own. It was a beautiful thing. 'Thanks, Kate,' said Belle. 'Not that I needed anything to remind me of you . . . you sassy little bitch.'

Kate's only exercise was walking, but being a notorious woman, whose flaming hair was unique in Shanghai, she disguised herself by wearing a hat which concealed her hair and a veil over the upper part of her face. Clad in unfashionable clothes, she escaped notice.

Over the years the North Szechuan Road had become more respectable. The less prosperous class of foreigners had gone to live out there as an extension of Hongkew. Returning from a long walk in that direction a few days after Belle Darling's departure, Kate paused opposite The Acropolis, whose shabby façade looked more sordid than ever. The place was padlocked and empty. Stones thrown through a ground floor window revealed the interior just as Kate remembered it. The life of The Acropolis had come to an end on the evening when the police had broken in to find Mary Simonides bleeding and unconscious on the floor. Several partly filled glasses remained on the bar. It was the abomination of desolation and it brought back a flood of ugly memories. Kate shivered. Then, remembering that she was free, while Toni and Mary Simonides were behind steel bars, she bared her teeth in what passed for a smile. Nothing could bring back the lost years, but the thought of these two and Konstantin Pavelitch behind bars helped.

'Good afternoon, Miss Marlowe,' said a voice just behind her.

She turned to see Detective-Inspector Harrower standing there, looking at her quizzically.

'Following me?' asked Kate.

'No, I saw you standing there deep in thought and I crossed the road to thank you for your help in putting these people where they belonged.'

'Don't thank me, Mr Harrower. It was a pleasure.'

'Yes, judging from your face a few moments ago, I believe it was a pleasure. Well, it doesn't matter. All that really matters is that this place is closed down for good and the owners are where they can do no more harm. They were as bad a pair as ever I came across. If I'm not intruding on your thoughts, Miss Marlowe, may I walk back with you towards The Bund?'

They walked together in silence for some minutes.

'Thanks to you, Miss Marlowe,' said Harrower after a while, 'I'm getting a promotion shortly. But do you know, even as I was giving evidence at the trials, it made me uncomfortable to realize how little of the story I really knew. Brilliant feats of detection, such as I took all the credit for, belong in fiction. I go so far as to say that ninety-five per cent of all serious crimes are solved either by informers or, and this is a sad confession, by beating the truth out of suspects.'

'Most informers, of course, do it for money. Not many are like you, actuated by public spirit. . . .'

'Don't waste your sarcasms on me, Mr Harrower!'

Another silence fell.

'I wonder whether, just for my private satisfaction, Miss Marlowe,' began the detective a little later, 'you would tell me one or two things. All quite unofficial, of course.'

'It depends what the things are,' replied Kate

'Well, my first big query is *why* you turned in Simonides and his wife.'

'To get police protection if I reopened Belle's house. I told you that.'

'I know you told me that,' said Harrower, 'and until a few minutes ago I believed you. Then I saw the expression on your

face as you stood outside The Acropolis. It told me that behind it all was another, deeper reason and . . . well, I suppose I'm puzzled.'

'Yes, there was, as you put it, a deeper reason. I don't in the least mind telling you what it was. Ten years ago, Mr Harrower, I came to Shanghai a clean-living, decent girl. I was a kind of sales model for an old woman called Rosalie Jenkins, who brought out gowns from Europe. She died, leaving me penniless. There was money due to me, but I couldn't prove it.

'Then, while looking for work, I went to stay at the Broadway Hotel. There I was trapped by – if it doesn't sound too melodramatic – three human vultures, Pavelitch, Mary Simonides and her husband. The worst was the woman. She was English and she came professing friendship. They sold me . . . like a joint of meat. . . .'

'Who did they sell you to?'

'Belle Darling.'

'Belle Darling!' echoed Harrower. 'The woman to whom, unless rumour lies, you paid a fortune for her house. Again, according to rumour, you paid her a lot more than it was worth. Feeling as strongly as you do about those others, why not Belle Darling too? Why give her a fortune and send the others to prison?'

Kate's reply was the bared teeth smile she had worn before.

'The price of the house was only money, you know. With it I bought something far more important than Belle's lease.'

'And that was?'

'Pavelitch and the Simonides couple, of course. Unless I had been in that filthy narcotics trade, how else do you suppose I had such accurate information about them?'

'That same thought occurred to me, Miss Marlowe, but I was as certain as I could well be that you had nothing to do with it. I would have known, even if I could not have proved it. We're not fools, you know, even if sometimes we look like it. So,' he added, nodding his head thoughtfully, 'old Belle turned them in, turned stool pigeon at the end.

'You know, Miss Marlowe, you've amazed me . . . amazed

me more than I can say. You don't strike me as being a person who forgives great injuries, so why, for heaven's sake, send those others to prison and let Belle off scot-free? I can't see much distinction, moral or otherwise, between the people who sold you, as you put it, and the woman who bought you. In fact, of them all, I rather think she was the worst of the lot. Yet you let her get away with it and made her a present of a fortune into the bargain. I just don't understand. Can you find fault with my reasoning?'

'No, Mr Harrower,' replied Kate with her wintry smile, 'I think your reasoning shows a remarkable understanding of my character . . . considering that you know so little about me? But what makes you suppose that Belle Darling *has* got away with it?'

'I saw her go,' said Harrower. 'What's more, she left loaded with diamonds and money. I call that getting away with it. But I'm not concerned with what she did to you, Miss Marlowe . . . anyway, not as a policeman, but didn't it occur to you that if she hadn't been trafficking in narcotics herself, she couldn't have given you the dead accurate information which enabled me to lay them all by the heels? I'm not complaining, mark you, but I find it hard to follow the workings of your mind over the whole thing. I would have thought you would have found a way of catching Belle in the same net as the others. . . .'

He turned to look at Kate, in whose eyes there was a bluish-green shimmer, like the sun reflected from a glacier. 'Surely, Mr Harrower, you don't think I overlooked that?'

The detective turned away embarrassed by what he saw. They were abreast of the Broadway Hotel then. It was being repainted and a sign outside read: 'Reopening soon under New Management.'

'Good Christians are supposed to forgive their enemies,' said Kate dreamily, 'but I have an idea that the people who forgive their enemies forget their friends just as easily. I try to remember both. . . .'

'But we were talking of Belle, weren't we? I can give you a piece of exclusive information about her . . . something you

might feel was worth passing on by cable to the U.S. Customs in San Francisco. . . .’

‘And what would that be?’ asked Harrower happily.

‘Belle is carrying a doll. It will be easy to recognize because it has hair exactly the same colour as mine. The doll, according to my information, contains heroin.’

‘I’m very grateful to you for the tip, Miss Marlowe, and I’ll most certainly pass it on to San Francisco. I’m not sure, but I think the U.S. Customs pay a reward in cases like this. If so, I’ll see that you get it.’

‘No, thank you, Mr Harrower. I don’t want blood money. My reward will be the satisfaction of knowing that Belle knows who tipped off the Customs. I can count on that, I hope?’

‘Yes, you can count on that, Miss Marlowe.’

‘Well,’ said Kate, hailing a rickshaw, ‘thank you for a very pleasant walk.’

For reasons not apparent many years later, Kate was silent on the subject of Belle Darling’s fate. It is possible, though not probable, that she underwent a change of heart. The Memory Box contained a letter signed ‘Gwen’, bearing a San Francisco postmark. With considerable glee, Gwen tells Kate that Belle Darling will never face trial for smuggling heroin. A hopeless addict herself, she went mad in prison while awaiting trial and was committed to an insane asylum. Young John, questioned between Kate’s death and the opening of the Memory Box, seemed to know nothing about Belle Darling’s end.

Twenty-five

A page, partially torn from a diary, reveals a moment of truth: 'I sent Florence packing today, the silly little fool! She meets a pimp outside and gives him her money. I won't have it. All the same, I am beginning to understand why whores put up with their pimps. It's the loneliest occupation in the world. I was tempted, but thank God I resisted, to let C. move in here. I would have dressed it up with pretty words that didn't mean much, but the end result would have been that C. would have become a sort of pimp . . . and quite happily. Maybe it isn't pimps who turn women into whores, but whores who turn men into pimps!'

THE FAÇADE of Belle Darling's house by the Soochow Creek looked much the same, but there was a difference. The front door gave admittance to only half the house, while to the remainder there were three discreet entrances, one through a godown, another through a café and a third, marked 'Trade Entrance', by way of a narrow alley and a garden.

The old front door, with the primly whitewashed step and polished brass knocker, was as brazenly unconcealed as always. It gave admission to a brothel, as in Belle's day, but a brothel with a difference. The 'young ladies'—they were never described otherwise by Young John, whose father went into retirement just before the opening—were not the roistering trollops who had taken their cue from Belle, but girls who might have been anything but what they were. Sonya, who was part Russian and part Polish, played the 'cello superbly. Sadie, who came from Brooklyn, was so S'uth'n that her little suite smelled of magnolia. Of Thérèse, who came from Marseille, but claimed Paris as her spiritual home, it was said that she kept a cash register beside the bed. But it was a slander on a most industrious little whore

who, thanks to a wonderful sense of double-entry bookkeeping, bought herself a marquis and died a marquise in Monte Carlo many years later.

Peggy was English. She was a nice girl, with a somewhat long upper lip for the trade she was in, but she had a following of satisfied customers who believed that fornication should be aloof to be admissible in polite circles.

Martha was a Swede. She looked cool but, according to those who should know, was not. True or untrue, she was in great demand. There were others, of course, but they came and went. Their one common denominator was a high sense of decorum. Those whose decorum fell below the high standard set by Kate did not last long.

'There is only one possible excuse for being a whore,' Kate would say in her pep-talk to newcomers, 'and that is to make a lot of money quickly and get out . . . before you get to liking it. To be a successful whore, you must hate it, hate every dirty degrading minute of it. Girls who like it end up in the houses which cater to drunken sailors and Lascars. Be polite, cheerful, use no bad language . . . in fact, behave like a hostess. Drink enough to be polite only. Let the men drink. No free list, no falling in love. I'll protect you from the pimps who will want to move in on your earnings, so obey the rules and we'll all grow rich. . . .'

In the background, available in case of trouble, was Ivan the Terrible and, if his size did not scare obstreperous clients into docility, he beat them silly with an enormous boxing-glove, which made no noise, and injured nobody. Financially it was a success. Kate refused to keep any girl whose personal earnings over and above all expenses were less than \$500 weekly. Most doubled this figure. Drinks were \$5 each, regardless of the drink, but champagne was \$50 the bottle, of which 25 per cent went to the girls.

One of the biggest items of expense was laundry because the rule of the house was clean sheets on the bed for every client, a refinement which paid off handsomely.

The other part of the establishment, which had the discreet

entrances at the rear, was an innovation to the China Coast and slow to gain recognition. It was not in any sense of the word a brothel, but was modelled on the time-honoured French *maison de rendezvous*. Admission was by card only and cards were issued after due vetting by Mr Wing. Even so, cardholders were only admitted after appointments had been made.

Cardholders were of both sexes. Men came to the house to meet women and women to meet men. Kate arranged the introductions for a fee. If the people so introduced were mutually attractive, they paid for a small suite of rooms, which they occupied for a night, a week, or as long as they pleased. They paid also for their food and drink, but it was implicit in the arrangement—though not enforceable—that no money passed between the two people concerned. They came for fun.

Kate's prime purpose in starting this second venture was a kind of insurance. To remain in business next door she had nothing more tangible than a police promise, verbal at that. In this *maison de rendezvous* Kate had a steadily growing list of the social and financial *élite* of Shanghai, all of whom had a vested interest in her survival. They could not afford to let her become involved in any scandal. Two at least of her cardholders were members of the Shanghai Municipal Council, the body which controlled the police. Others were bankers, successful brokers, *taipans* of the big business *hongs*. One of these, incidentally, was an Ingleby. Several were members of the Consular Corps, as they liked to call themselves.

This sideline was not only immensely profitable, but it made Kate untouchable. From start to finish, the only times when the police entered either establishment were at Kate's own telephoned request.

Occasionally, there was a *contretemps* when one of Belle's former customers arrived drunk in the early hours of the morning yelling for Belle to bring on the girls. Eyebrows were lifted in the private suites and understandably so, for noises reminiscent of a sailors' brothel tended to destroy the atmosphere of romance. But Ivan the Terrible developed a technique for dealing with them silently and expeditiously.

Once, through a lamentable piece of carelessness on Kate's part, a husband and wife had appointments for the same night in the *maison de rendezvous*, but with different partners. The wife recognized her husband's cough, identified the suite where he was sleeping with her best friend. Her partner in the meantime had slunk out. Kate did the only thing possible to save the day and warned the other woman to leave also.

The husband and wife spent the rest of that night together and the reconciliation became permanent.

The only communication between the two houses was through Kate's private suite, which was in neither house, but controlled both.

Kate's diaries covering these years establish as an interesting fact, but with no bearing on the story, that nearly all the violent disturbances which occurred, occurred on the night of the full moon. Students note.

A few days after this is another entry: 'Colin has found me. I always knew he would. Now what?'

It was a bitter January night. An icy north-west wind was blowing down from Siberia via the Gobi Desert. There was a flurry of gritty snow. It was a quiet night for business so Kate, wrapped in furs, went for a long walk in the deserted streets. Young John, wondering at such stupidity, came along as a body-guard, walking some twenty paces in the rear.

Where the angle of the Astor House Hotel formed the upper end of Broadway, there was a bright patch of light coming from the windows of a bar. Kate stood for a few moments—the words are hers—'envying the good fellowship within and realizing that I belonged to nothing and nobody'.

Behind her, Kate heard Young John engaged in an altercation with a drunk. When it was over she walked back to the house, intending to take a night away from business. She loved her now rare evenings and nights spent at the *Villa Eglantine*, the only place on earth she could call home and where she was her own woman.

A few moments after arriving back at the house by the Soochow Creek, Kate heard a disturbance at the front door

Young John knocked at the door of her private office. 'There is a man at the door, madam,' he said hesitantly. 'He is a little drunk. He says madam knows him and will see him. But he is shabby and not the kind of man madam would care to know. He gave me this piece of paper . . .'

On a torn scrap of paper, written in pencil, was: 'Please see me. Colin.'

'Shall I call Ivan?' asked Young John.

'No, John,' replied Kate wearily, 'bring him up here. I can handle him without help.'

There was a bewildered look on Colin's face as, with ill-concealed disdain, Young John ushered him into Kate's room. He had been a long time away from deep-pile carpets, brocaded silk hangings and all the other evidences of good taste and luxury, which are so seldom partners. 'Hello, Katie,' he mumbled. 'It's good to see you again. It's been a long time.'

'No long enough for me, Colin. What do you want?'

'Want? A kind word . . . if you've got one. Failing that, a drink, I s'pose.'

Walking towards a corner cupboard, Kate produced a bottle of whisky and a glass. 'Help yourself,' she said curtly, 'and before you drink yourself silly, perhaps you'll tell me how you found me.'

'I tried to speak to you near the Astor House . . . you were looking in the window of a bar. That young Chinese stopped me, so I followed you here . . .'

'What made you come to Shanghai? Did you know I was here?'

'Years ago in Sydney, just after the divorce, I saw the Shanghai labels on your trunks. I thought, I s'pose, that you just might be here. I jumped ship on the off chance of finding you . . . that's all.'

'Well, as I said before, what do you want? You have a drink.'

He took a big swig of whisky, gagged on it and wiped his lips with his sleeve. 'I'd better take some water with it. I've not eaten much today . . . or yesterday.'

Kate rang the bell. 'Bring this gentleman a large plate of ham

and eggs, some toast and a pot of strong coffee,' she told the boy who answered.

'You seem to have done well for yourself, Katie,' said Colin, his eyes wandering around the richly furnished room.

'Appearances are sometimes deceptive, Colin. You don't seem to have prospered. The same old reasons? Drink and dishonesty? They are bad enough singly, but as a combination I would say they are fatal.'

Just then the telephone rang. Kate answered it. 'That's very flattering of you, Jimmy,' she said coyly after a brief interchange. 'Are you sure you wouldn't like one of the others? I'm very, very expensive, Jimmy, so don't say you weren't warned. Very well, then, at eleven o'clock. I'll be waiting for you.'

Except for the animal noises as Colin wolfed his ham and eggs, there was silence for some minutes until he had finished. 'If you've had enough, Colin,' said Kate coldly, in marked contrast to her tone on the phone, 'perhaps you'll tell me what you want.'

'I s'pose I wanted to see you again, Katie. Any harm in that?'

'All right, you've seen me. You've had food and drink. So there's nothing further to keep you, is there?'

'It's damned cold out, Katie, and if I could doss down on a couch for the night . . .'

'I'm sorry, but that isn't possible,' said Kate. 'We haven't that kind of clientèle. However, if you are hungry, thirsty and have nowhere to sleep, I will help you. I wouldn't turn a dog out on a night like this. Here is some money,' she added, taking two \$10 notes from a drawer.

'What is this place?' asked Colin, ignoring the money. 'Are you in some kind of a business?'

'Of course I'm in business! The only possible business for a girl stranded in the Far East . . .'

'You mean . . . ?'

'I mean, Colin, that this is a whore-house and I'm a whore. The money that bought your ham and eggs, the whisky and this twenty dollars which you'd better put in your pocket before I change my mind, were all earned on my back, as we say in the trade. That phone call was from a man who is going to sleep

with me tonight. It's going to cost him \$500 cash money, plus another \$50 for the bottle of champagne I shall pretend to drink. You should be proud of me, Colin, because I'm the most expensive whore on the China Coast. You should be proud of yourself too, because it was you, after all, who gave me my start. I've worn well, don't you think . . . considering everything? Soon I shall be thirty-five, the half-way mark, but I don't look it, do I? Soon, of course, I shall lose my looks and my price will have to drop. But not for a while yet. You see, as the most notorious whore on the China Coast, I have a certain snob value. I'm known as Singapore Kate, by the way. To have slept with Singapore Kate, you see, carries a certain cachet.

'Another drink before you go, Colin?'

He was like a man transfixed, looking at her in round-eyed horror. Then he collapsed. He was a big man who suddenly seemed small. Tears streamed down his face and deep sobs shook him. The two banknotes dropped from his limp fingers on to the carpet.

'You seem shocked, Colin. How else, do you suppose, a beautiful girl with no training or aptitude can make a living? When you saw me in Sydney, you must have known that I was prosperous. How and where did you think I got the money?'

'I s'pose I thought you'd married a rich man . . .'

'Before troubling to divorce you? Even you couldn't be such a fool as to suppose that. The truth is that you didn't care where the money came from. It was money, wasn't it, and all you cared about was getting some of it.

'Well, you've got some of it, so clear out.'

Kate waited until he had shambled towards the door. 'I won't let you starve,' she said as his back was disappearing, 'anyway not in Shanghai. So, when you need another twenty dollars, just ring the front doorbell. Late afternoon is the best time, before the customers arrive.

'You'll be back, Colin, just ring the bell and if I'm out a servant will hand you twenty dollars of your ex-wife's earnings as a whore. It will be interesting to see how many times your pride allows you to come. It will be a battle between your pride

-that makes me laugh-and your thirst and, unless you've changed the hell of a lot during these last years, thirst will be the winner.

'And now, unless it would amuse you to see me prink and perfume myself for another man's enjoyment, you will have to excuse me.'

'God! How you must hate me!'

'Don't flatter yourself, my dear Colin. I don't hate you. You should see what I do to the people I hate. You are just a stupid, self-indulging, useless oaf and I despise you. Don't bother to say good-bye, because you'll be here again . . . and again . . . and again for your twenty dollars, so leave me to earn it.'

From the window which looked out across the Soochow Creek, Kate watched him shamble out of the front door and stand for a few moments under a street light. The two \$10 notes were clutched in his hand and it was plain to see that he was racked by indecision . . . to pocket the money, or not. In a great effort to remember that he had once been a man, Colin screwed the notes into a ball and pitched them in the gutter.

It was a long time since Kate had prayed, but she prayed now that pride and self-respect would win the battle and that he would walk on and out of sight, leaving the money where he had thrown it. He went out of sight once, but returned, stood for whole minutes gazing down into the gutter, torn visibly by his indecision. Once again, he straightened his shoulders, held his chin up and turned to leave.

After another long pause, Colin looked up and down the road to see whether he was observed. Then, stooping quickly, he retrieved the two notes and, stuffing them deeply into a trousers pocket, broke into a shambling trot and was soon out of sight.

It was then that Kate gave way to her pent-up tears, for she knew that on the road Colin had taken there was now no turning back. He was irretrievably damned. She knew sadly that if from his degradation he had somehow summoned the pride and the courage to throw the money back in her face, make her swallow her insults and, if need be, beaten her until she begged his pardon, there would have been, despite everything, room in her

empty heart for him. Not love, for it was too late for that, but pity, which was supposed to be the next best thing. But now there was no room even for pity. She gave herself over to tears.

When her partner for the night arrived, he was sent away. It was against all the rules, for whores, like actors, share the foolish tradition that, though hearts be breaking, the show must go on.

Twenty-six

The last diary entry—at least, the last to survive—is dated January 17th, 1921. It is in a way the most eloquent of them all. It was written at sea: 'Only now that I have left S'hai for ever can I realize how much I hated it. It was raining, so I could not shake its dust off my feet. The people who tried to run me out have all gone. I never had any friends and at the last there were no enemies. So there was no sense in staying another hour, because it was always my enemies who kept me there. I have no plans. S'pore Kate is dead. The world is open to me. I am rich. I have beauty . . . anyway, men still leer at me and undress me with their eyes, so I suppose I still have something they want.'

IN ITS long and bawdy history, The Line in Shanghai had always been tolerated, even in strait-laced circles, because its shortcomings so obviously pointed their own moral. Fights, screams in the night, filthy language and the robbery of drunken patrons, were a commonplace. It was not necessary to point out to anyone that these houses were vicious resorts for mostly vicious people, from whose eyes the scales of illusion were stripped. The inmates were whores and looked like whores.

Then, dating almost from the hour when Kate took over Belle Darling's house, there was a marked change in The Line. Taking their cue from Kate, the other madams realized that the old flamboyant parading of vice would not be tolerated much longer, and while they never became as respectable as Kate, they ran their houses with some discretion.

Once again, Kate incurred the wrath of the unco guid, because so discreetly did she run her establishments that they were faced by the paradox of a brothel cloaked in an air of gentility. There were no scandals of any kind, no patrons found unconscious in

the gutter. The incidence of venereal disease—always potent as a horrible example—dropped to the irreducible minimum. The ‘young ladies’ behaved as such. Drunken men were not admitted. Those who used filthy language were warned once and then, if they repeated the offence, ejected by Ivan the Terrible. Young men were not excluded, but they were positively not encouraged, so Kate could never be accused of corrupting young men, or leading them astray.

In the eyes of the do-gooders Belle Darling had been the archetype of the traditional madam. Her violence, foul language, repulsive appearance and general ill-repute had been their own best advertisement. For years every effort to reform The Line by outside pressure had failed. Then with Kate, reform came from within, not from without. That alone was an unpardonable affront because when one sinner repents there is always a rush to claim credit for having brought about the change of heart.

Last and least pardonable were the good taste and luxury under Kate’s management. Everything in the place . . . furniture, carpets, hangings, servants, food, drink and manners, were the best obtainable. Kate’s harshest critics resented bitterly the fact that in their private lives the standards of decorum frequently fell below hers.

Kate was not pure in heart. She did not pretend to be. Neither were her critics. Their attitude was not unlike that of communists towards a good employer. They hate him because he is the negation of all their theories. Employers must be bad, grasping and unjust. While they are that, communism loves them.

But from the very beginning, everything that Singapore Kate did was wrong. Shanghai treated her as a whore when she was a virtuous young woman trying to keep her head above water in circumstances of appalling difficulty.

Kate’s discouragement of young men was not, and did not pretend to be, anything but good business. The older men almost always had more money and, quite obviously, caused less wear and tear. ‘You are here to work,’ Kate told the girls primly when

they protested, 'not for pleasure. All that kind of thing can wait.'

Two of Kate's girls married Shanghai men and while it would be too much to say that society welcomed them with outstretched arms, they were accepted. Furthermore, once they had lived down the past, they became inconspicuous against their new background, suggesting that there is not such a great difference as we would like to believe between women who marry for money and their less fortunate sisters.

Until his retirement early in 1915, Charles Borbridge's importunities were a nuisance to Kate, but she would not relent and never spoke to him again. 'He was my great mistake,' she said years later. 'For his sake as much as mine, I should have made him pay. A kind whore, which is what I was trying to be, earns no gratitude and usually ends in the gutter. I don't profess to understand why, but I state as a fact from long experience that men have more respect for the women who exploit them than for the "nice" ones. They trample all over those.'

Then for a while Shanghai found something other than Singapore Kate to talk about. An Austrian archduke was assassinated at Scrajevo and the world went up in flames. Within hours of the news of Britain's declaration of war against Germany, a British contingent from Shanghai began to take shape. Gordon Maitland, who was about thirty-six years of age and not likely to make a good soldier, was among the first volunteers, a decision which brought to a head the curious relationship existing for so long between him and Kate. It is difficult to understand, let alone to describe with any accuracy. The two important factors which can be stated with certainty are Maitland's crushing sense of guilt because of his willingness to believe the worst of her, which had precipitated her fall from grace and—equally important—the hardening processes which went on in her, from which stemmed a desire to punish the man whom she really loved. Freud might have understood.

These two unhappy people—their unhappiness none the less acute because self-inflicted—dined together at the *Villa Eglantine*

the evening before the Shanghai contingent sailed for Europe. For years their talk when they met had been impersonal. It had seemed better that way. But on this last evening before a separation which at best might be for years and at worst for ever, they were both under the spell of the might-have-beens.

It was a warm autumn evening. They lingered in the garden over their coffee. A little before midnight, Gordon rose to leave, dreading the parting but anxious none the less to have done with it.

'You don't have to go, Gordon,' said Kate shyly, as the girl he had known twelve years previously might have spoken, 'if half my bed is enough for you.'

He shook his head. 'It wouldn't work, Kate, not unless I knew that it was my half for keeps. It might not even then, but I'd be willing to try.'

'There need not be any others, Gordon, if you'll forget this nonsense of going to the war.'

'You know I can't do that, Kate. I'm committed. Besides, it's my duty.'

'Don't prate to me of duty! A man's first duty is to the woman he loves . . . if he loves her, then his children and his country come a bad last. It was your duty years ago, because you said you loved me, to have given me the benefit of every doubt there was. That's what love means. A part of it is trust. Duty! Your interpretation of duty seems to be what suits you. I'm not asking you to marry me if you don't want to, but it starts right now tonight Gordon, or it never starts. We have a chance of happiness. Not a big chance, I grant you, but a chance. Well, if you love me, I say take it. There won't be another.'

'You know I love you, Kate. I've never ceased loving you, despite everything, from the moment we first met. But I'm going off to the war tomorrow.'

'I see, Gordon. Set it to music. I could not love thee dear so much, loved I not honour more!'

'If sarcasm makes you feel better, my dear, go ahead. But that's how it is. Good luck and God bless you.'

'Don't go for a moment, Gordon,' said Kate unhappily. 'I

couldn't bear to part with you in anger. Look after yourself and come back to me safely.'

They kissed at the garden gate. Kate stood there watching until he was out of sight. 'My heart is like stone,' she said to her diary that night. 'I wonder,' she went on in lonely soliloquy, 'whether it is true that whores make good wives. Why not? But it is only a special kind of man, not Gordon's kind, who could marry a whore and be happy.'

Gordon Maitland sailed with the contingent the next day. Most of them did not come back.

For Kate the war was a blank period, of which in later years she remembered almost nothing. During it she was able to tidy up the loose ends of her life.

Charles Borbridge, who had stayed on in China two years beyond the retirement age, left in 1915 for good. But almost until the day of departure he went on trying to see Kate. She refused to see him, although on more than one occasion she answered the telephone when he called. It was a relief when he went.

There was a softening of Shanghai's attitude towards Kate when it became known that but for her generosity many men could not have gone with the first contingent. First, she cancelled the debts owing to her by any member. Each man received his 'chits' torn in halves, together with an order on a Shanghai shop for thick winter clothing. Various stories are current about the grand total of these benefactions, but Kate herself either did not or would not recall what it was.

At this time Kate, there is reason to believe, softened her attitude to the world. The prime beneficiary here was Colin Wilder who, on nineteen occasions, all noted in Kate's diary, called at the house near the Soochow Creek for his dole of twenty dollars. Kate did not see him again until the last occasion when, shocked by his appearance, she paid his expenses in a clinic for six months. This unquestionably saved his life, for he was not far from being a hopeless drug addict. When he had returned to health and some semblance of manhood, she gave him a ticket

to Australia, which was where he wanted to go, and a bank draft encashable on arrival. Whereupon he passed out of Kate's life altogether. A sad note, posted in Singapore, was the epitaph of their marriage. 'It might have been so wonderful, Katie, and it was all my fault that it wasn't. Try to forgive me.'

It probably was not *all* the unhappy man's fault. It never is. But the major share of the blame seems to have rested squarely on his shoulders.

Kate's houses continued to make money all through the war, but not spectacularly large sums. Her most profitable investment at this time turned out to be the timber business she had acquired on the advice of Jakes years previously. By good fortune rather than good judgment, it was heavily overstocked at the outbreak of war, with valuable forward contracts as well. The price of timber soared and at the war's end she was a very rich woman.

In 1919 she learned that Gordon Maitland had survived the war, but was not going to return to Shanghai. Most of his personal possessions were stored at the *Villa Eglantine*. These she sent to his club in London, the only address she had.

But Shanghai had not quite finished with Kate. Another campaign was waged against her by a society with a high-sounding name and, of course, a paid secretary. She retaliated in characteristic fashion.

With the help of Mr Wing and a Chinese lawyer, Kate prepared a cadastral plan of the International Settlement on which was marked the exact locations of more than a thousand brothels. A key appended disclosed the ownership of each. That is to say, the ownership of the land on which the brothels stood, not the brothels as going concerns. More than two hundred of these were owned by churches and missions, including all Christian denominations except the very obscure sects. When this was shown to the people responsible for the campaign against her, the campaign collapsed. Kate's threat to distribute copies widely was highly effective. As many Shanghai people had learned to their cost, Kate had sharp teeth and claws and was well able to defend herself.

Realizing that she was already part of a legend, Kate knew it was time to go.

In 1919 there was a great exodus of Europeans—the term here includes Americans—from Shanghai, people who had been forced to remain all through the war years, others whose retirement had been postponed, and so on. Their places were taken by newcomers. ‘It was a great relief,’ said Kate long afterwards, ‘to walk through the streets of Shanghai unrecognized and to recognize very few of the faces I knew. The newcomers, of course, had heard of Singapore Kate and most of what they had heard—the good and the bad—was not true. But they did not identify me with her. I read many things in their eyes, but almost never the hostility with which I had been surrounded ever since I came to Shanghai.’

It was about that time that Kate began to realize a few things about herself. She realized, for example, that she had lingered on in Shanghai only because of the pressure which had been exerted to drive her out. True to her promises, or threats, she had outstayed her enemies. Death, retirement and disgrace had taken care of these and Kate could already hear the hollow thud of anticlimax. There were no more battles to win and, therefore, no more valid reason to remain in Shanghai, a place which she detested and where she had barely passed a happy week since she arrived with old Rosalie Jenkins nearly seventeen years previously.

The lease of the premises beside the Soochow Creek had nearly run out, so there was nothing left to sell except the contents. It was doubtful, even if Kate had so wished, whether she could have obtained a new lease for the same purpose, so the sands were running out for her and she was glad. She was then a very rich woman. Most of the girls who had been in her house were passing rich, too. Under the lash of her tongue they had learned the good sense of thrift and providence and the other rules of conduct she had never ceased to din into their heads. Theirs, she had always insisted, was a vile, dirty trade and the only possible excuse for plying it was to grow rich.

In every where, Kate believed, there was a real craving for respectability. With money it was possible to go away to any part of the world where, quite unknown, they would be able to build a new life where the dragon of the past could not rise up to embarrass them. And, according to Kate, some of them did achieve this longed-for anonymity and respectability.

Kate had a good sense of humour, but she was never able to see anything humorous in the application of Sunday school philosophy and copybook maxims to the community life of a brothel, which was precisely what she did.

Kate offered to walk out of the house, leaving the girls to run it as they pleased until the lease expired. But they had the good sense to refuse, knowing that without Kate to crack the whip and make them toe the line there would be chaos. Also, they lacked Kate's gift for dealing with the police and keeping their demands within bounds. Unanimously, they decided to close down the house and go their several ways.

Soon after this decision had been reached, there appeared in the public press an announcement that the entire contents of the house would be sold by auction. No mention was made of what the house was, but merely the street and number. There was, however, a broad hint because, in addition to the carpets, curtains, furniture and the like, there was listed an incredible amount of bed linen, probably more than possessed by any but the biggest hotel in Shanghai, and one other item: 'About 250 ladies' evening gowns.' This, to any but the most obtuse, told its own story.

All fashionable Shanghai flocked to the auction. The women outnumbered the men by four to one. Whether from the auction fever which attacks so many people, the desire to pick up bargains, or a morbid wish to see where their menfolk had been disporting themselves for years, the ladies of Shanghai bought everything, even down to the used evening gowns. A few sentimentalists among the men bought odds and ends of furniture as souvenirs of the days which would never return.

One of the last items to be sold was listed as 'a carved-ivory four-poster bed, probably the only bed of its kind in existence

and a unique example of the ivory-carver's art'. The catalogue did not say specifically that the bed belonged to Singapore Kate, because this was not necessary. Most people had heard of this bed, just as they had heard garbled stories of what had happened in it. In describing it, many Shanghailanders who had never seen it alleged that the carvings were grossly indecent. This was not the truth. The bed in question is in London today in the possession of the grandson of the man who bought it at the auction, and there was nothing indecent about it except the imaginations of those who started the legend. It is just what it was purported to be, a beautifully carved ivory bed. Strictly speaking, it is not a four-poster. Four curved tusks, one at each corner, curve towards the centre of the bed, failing to meet at their points by about two feet. Attached to these points is a carved ivory disc which embodies what appears to be the signs of the Zodiac.

'What am I bid for this magnificent carved-ivory bed?' asked the auctioneer, after people had been allowed time for inspection. 'I doubt whether there is in existence a better example of this particular Chinese art form.'

There was no quick response, partly because it was a somewhat notorious and magnificent piece of furniture for the average house, and partly because nobody seemed to have the remotest idea of its value. What was it worth? A thousand dollars? Fifty thousand? One figure was no more ridiculous than the other. In point of fact, Kate had paid \$18,000 for it about ten years previously, but nobody present knew that..

There came a timid bid of \$500. Then \$600 and, by small increases, up to \$1,500.

'This is ridiculous,' said the auctioneer. 'I am offered only \$1,500 for a bed which would be a bargain at ten times the price. This, ladies and gentlemen, is a museum piece. Do I hear another offer?'

The bidding rose slowly to \$5,000 odd, at which all but two bidders dropped out.

At \$6,000 odd one of these bidders seemed to weaken and the auctioneer made one more last effort. 'I am offered only six

thousand dollars, ladies and gentlemen,' he pleaded. 'You can't be serious. The ivory alone, uncarved, is worth that.'

The bids were raised by a few hundred dollars and at \$7,200 bidding seemed to come to a standstill. The auctioneer made one last effort, immortalizing himself along with the Singapore Kate legend.

'Seventy-two hundred dollars I am bid. Any advance on seventy-two hundred?'

'Seventy-five hundred,' called a voice, followed by silence.

'For the last time, ladies and gentlemen, before this magnificent lot is knocked down to the gentleman in the corner. Any advance on seventy-five hundred?'

There was silence.

The auctioneer raised his hammer. 'Going, at seventy-five hundred dollars! Seventy-five hundred is a small fraction of its true value. Do you realize, ladies and gentlemen,' he asked in desperation, 'that every screw in this bed cost five hundred dollars?'

Down came the hammer and with it down came the curtain on Singapore Kate. She left Shanghai quietly, as she had come. Her only farewell was to Old John, whom she saw through a mist of tears. His kindness, loyalty and understanding were the best fruit she had plucked from the ancient Flowery Kingdom lately turned republic.